



District Leadership Forum

Project Director

Maria Wahlstrom

Contributing Consultants

Rebecca Richards Margaret Sullivan

Program Directors

Pete Talbot Meredith McNeill

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Principal Hiring Playbook

Toolkit Overview

Strategic thinking and interpersonal skills are qualities of highly effective leaders, yet both are difficult to screen through typical principal interview questions. Instead of relying on candidates' narrative accounts of prior experience, incorporate skills-based demonstrations that paint a more objective picture of candidates' qualifications. Supplement the traditional principal interview process with a real-time **case interview** and **role play exercise**, as outlined in the example interview sequence below. These activities can be incorporated together or independently as desired by the district hiring team.

Recommended Sequence for a 1-Hour Principal Interview

20 MIN

Professional Fit Questions



Use this time to ask questions mandated by district hiring leadership. While specific resources for implementation are not provided in this guide, ensure chosen questions cover all core topics listed below.

Common Principal Interview Question Topics

- General professional background
- Knowledge of teaching & learning
- Personnel & hiring experience
- Budget & facilities management
- Public relations & communication
- Vision & personal philosophy



20-30 MIN

Case Interview



Evaluate Strategic & Analytical Thinking

Require candidates to present a data-driven plan of action for addressing a school's challenges.

Case Interview Materials pg. 4-12



10-20 MIN

Role-Play Exercise



Evaluate Interpersonal Skills

Assess hard-to-measure interpersonal competencies by role-playing common scenarios the candidate might encounter while on the job.

Role-Play Exercise Materials pg. 13-18

STRATEGIC & ANALYTICAL THINKING



Conduct a Case Interview

Take an interactive problem-solving approach to interviews by requiring candidates to analyze a school profile and present a detailed plan of action for addressing the school's challenges.

Objective

Candidates will demonstrate **strategic thinking skills** by analyzing data and presenting solutions to real school challenges.

Resources

Time: 30 minutes of a 60-minute interview

Recommended Facilitator: Superintendent or Principal Supervisor

Participant: Principal Candidate

Materials: Case interview prompt, Case Interview Scoring Sheet

Implementation Steps

Before the Interview

- Select the case. Two examples are provided in this toolkit. To create your own case, use the Case Interview Template.
- **Review the case interview prompt and scoring sheet.** Interviewer scripting is provided, but be prepared for candidate-driven conversation outside the topics listed on the case prompt.

During the Interview

- **Read the case to the candidate.** Scripting is provided on the completed examples.
- **Give the candidate time to ask questions.** Answers to common questions for each case are provided.
- **Engage in a conversation about the case.** Ask the candidate to clarify their response, or, add complexity by sharing extra data points.
- 6 Ask the candidate to present their thought process and final solutions.

After the Interview

Evaluate candidate performance. Use the provided Case Interview Scoring Sheet to assess demonstrated strategic thinking skills.

Case Interview Example #1



Topics: Student behavior, student mobility, teacher evaluations

Time: 30 minutes of a 60-minute interview

Materials: Case interview prompt, Case Interview Scoring Sheet

1

Present Driving Question & Data

Interviewer Notes/Comments



Interviewer: Use the informational data points I'm about to give you to uncover why the school is facing these challenges and, ultimately, how you might go about solving these challenges. Feel free to take notes as I review the relevant data:

- Emerson Township High School has 600 students in grades 9-12.
- Although students can articulate the school values and behavioral expectations, they do not consistently follow these guidelines, particularly rules about transitioning in the hallways during passing periods. The first two days of the school year are focused strictly on explaining, modeling, and practicing rules and procedures with students.
- 19% of students are failing their first-period class.
- In order to better differentiate instruction, the school tiered students into classes with A/B groupings based upon students' instructional strengths and areas of development.
- All staff members report feeling a sense of urgency around student achievement.
- Leadership flagged certain teachers based on classroom observations/lesson plans and required that these teachers submit each week's lessons the Friday prior.
- During the last school year, the student mobility rate was 30.9%.



Give Candidate Time to Formulate Questions and a Response



Interviewer: Please take a few minutes to think through what your ideas and solutions might be. Feel free to ask questions. Depending on your questions, I have additional information I may be able to provide.

Overall, I'm interested in hearing your thought processes and will redirect or give you additional context where necessary.

Case Interview Example #1 (cont.)

3 Answer Questions and/or Add Complexity	Interviewer Notes/Comments
Interviewer Note: Withhold the following information from candidates until they ask the right questions— or, if the candidate does not ask, it is optional to bring up these points as an extra layer of complexity to the challenge.	
Data Teams: The school data team is comprised of one teacher per grade level, and the team meets monthly; however, members often do not bring data from their grade levels to these meetings.	
Teacher Performance: Teachers have been evaluated as effective or highly effective during the past two years.	
Behavior System: All classes use the PAWS behavior system, whereby students accrue points for good behavior and lose points for misbehavior. Every three weeks, there is a celebration for students who have earned a pre-specified minimum number of points. There is inconsistent investment in the PAWS system from teachers and students alike.	
Student Mobility: When a student transfers to the school, the counselor assigns the student to class(es) and gives the new student a tour of the school before taking the student to class. Staff members described their frustration with the delays in obtaining complete student records from the schools the children previously attended.	
4 Ask Follow up Question and/or Redirect When Necessary	
 Follow-up Questions: Why did you choose that solution over another one (e.g., common alternative solution to the candidate's recommendation)? What if the school were much bigger? Would you change your approach? 	
 Redirection Questions: Understanding the student demographics we discussed, that solution might not be feasible here—any other ideas? 	
 We don't have enough funding or staff for that—how else could you solve this problem? 	

necessary.

Case Interview Example #2



Topics: Academic achievement, teacher placement, school culture

Time: 30 minutes of a 60-minute interview

Materials: Case interview prompt, Case Interview So	coring Sheet
1 Present Driving Question & Data	Interviewer Notes/Comments
 Interviewer: Use the informational data points I'm about to give you to uncover why the school is facing these challenges and, ultimately, how you might go about solving these challenges. Feel free to take notes as I review the relevant data: Robertson Middle School has 600 students in 6th-8th grade. The same 6th grade advanced mathematics vacancy has gone unfilled for two years in a row. The 4-5 students testing into advanced math each year have been pulled into 7th grade math classes. 53% of 6th-8th grade students have not scored as "proficient" on state math tests. 35% of students in 4th-8th grade are chronically absent. The percentage of teachers teaching one or more classes outside their subject specialization is high and has been increasing. New families are pleased with school culture, reporting that more kids feel safe in school than out of school. 	
2 Give Candidate Time to Formulate Questions and a Response	
Interviewer: Please take a few minutes to think through what your ideas and solutions might be. Feel free to ask questions. Depending on your questions, I have additional information I may be able to provide.	
Overall, I'm interested in hearing your thought processes and will redirect or give you additional context where	

Case Interview Example #2 (cont.)

Answer Questions and/or Add Complexity	Interviewer Notes/Comments
Interviewer Note: Withhold the following information from candidates until they ask the right questions— or, if the candidate does not ask, it is optional to bring up these points as an extra layer of complexity to the challenge.	
Demographics: 75% of the student population qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch. 70% of the faculty were educated in other states.	
Hiring Procedure: The same job posting has been visible on various state or district-run job sites. Most teacher vacancies are filled in within one month of school beginning in August. The 6 th grade advanced math position has not been prioritized, as Robertson MS needs to hire 7-10 new grade-level teachers every year.	
Data Teams: The school data team is comprised of one teacher per grade level, and the team meets monthly; however, members often do not bring data from their grade levels to these meetings.	
Teacher Performance: Teachers have been evaluated as effective or highly effective during the past two years.	
Ask Follow up Question and/or Redirect When Necessary	
 Follow-up Questions: Why did you choose that solution over another one (e.g., common alternative solution to the candidate's recommendation)? What if the school were much bigger? Would you change your approach? 	
Redirection Questions:	
 Understanding the student demographics we discussed, that solution might not be feasible here— any other ideas? 	
 We don't have enough funding or staff for that—how else could you solve this problem? 	

Case Interview Template



Topics:

Time: 30 minutes of a 60-minute interview

Materials: Case interview prompt, School Data Sheet, case interview rubric

1 Present Driving Question & Data	Interviewer Notes/Comments
Interviewer: Use the informational data points I'm about to give you to uncover why the school is facing these challenges and, ultimately, how you might go about solving these challenges.	
Questions and a Response	
Interviewer: Please take a few minutes to think through what your ideas and solutions might be. Feel free to ask questions. Depending on your questions, I have additional information I may be able to provide. Overall, I'm interested in hearing your thought processes and will redirect or give you additional context where necessary.	

Case Interview Template (cont.)

3 Answer Questions and/or Add Complexity	Interviewer Notes/Comments
Interviewer Note: Withhold the following information from candidates until they ask the right questions— or, if the candidate does not ask, it is optional to bring up these points as an extra layer of complexity to the challenge.	
4 Ask Follow up Question and/or Redirect When Necessary	
Follow-up Questions/Redirection Questions:	

Case Interview Scoring Sheet

	N/A	Not demonstrated by candidate		Weak demonstrat	ion 2	2 -	Average demonstra	ation	3 - Excel demo	lent onstratio	n
		Interview -			N/A	1	2	3		erviev /Com	wer ments
		g of the Problen			_	_	_	_	110000/		
		e recaps the backg ate understanding		mation to	Ш	П	Ш	Ш			
•	and enum	e focuses on key el perates details for son is needed									
•		e asks 1-3 clarifyin ed background info		s based							
•	Candidate initial resp	e takes 2-5 minute oonse	s to constr	uct an							
					Sul	o Sc	ore:				
Rigo	orous Thir	nking & Structure	ed Respor	ıse							
	Candidate hypothesis	provides an over- s	-arching te	stable							
	response	support hypothes consisting of high- by data-driven de	level strate								
•		e converses openly er and explains his		ng out							
		asks at least 3 ap nversation that hel pothesis									
		relies on available n assumptions	e data and	evidence							
•		e demonstrates fle when posed with a g data									
					Sub	Sc	ore:				
Fina	l Solution	ns & Recommend	lations								
	Candidate reached a	communicates wh solution	nen they ha	ave							
•		clearly summariz tying it back to in									
•	solution, p	e walks interviewer proposing actional xt-steps for furthe	ole recomm								
					Sub	Sc.	ore:				
		Se	e next nage	for guidan	ce on inte	ernrei	ina scores	To	tal Sco	ro:	

Case Interview Scoring Sheet (cont.)



- Interpreting Scores -

Total Score:

Score Range	Strategic & Analytical Thinking Maturity Stage
32 - 39	Advanced: Candidate achieves a high standard of strategic thinking at a level proficient for principal leadership. Minimal additional training required.
26 - 31	Intermediate: Candidate achieves an average standard of strategic thinking and will require additional training to demonstrate advanced leadership.
13 - 25	Early: Candidate achieves below the standard of strategic thinking necessary for effective principal leadership. Rigorous additional training will be required.
0 - 12	Hiring at this level of skill is not advised.

Additional Notes During Deliberation:



Evaluate Interpersonal Skills

Assess hard-to-measure social and interpersonal competencies by role-playing common scenarios the candidate might encounter while on the job.

Objective

Candidates will demonstrate job-ready **interpersonal skills** by responding to a role-play scenario.

Resources

Time: 10-20 minutes of a 60-minute interview

Recommended Facilitator: Superintendent or Principal Supervisor,

other members of interview team

Participant: Principal Candidate

Materials: Role-play prompt, role-play rubric

Implementation Steps

Before the Interview

- Select a prompt. Two examples are provided in this toolkit. To create your own prompt, use the Role-Play Exercise Template.
- **Review the role-play prompt and scoring sheet.** Interviewer scripting is provided to begin each prompt, but be prepared to drive conversation beyond the candidate's initial response.

During the Interview

- **Read background information to the candidate.** Scripting is provided with the completed examples.
- **Begin conversation.** An opening statement is provided with each example. Further conversation will be created organically.



Remember, the candidate is being assessed on interpersonal skills – not necessarily strategic and analytical thinking. You are monitoring the manner in which the candidate responds, not the accuracy of their problem solving.

After the Interview

Evaluate candidate performance. Use the provided Interpersonal Skills Scoring Sheet to assess demonstrated interpersonal skills.

Role-Play Exercise Example #1



Topics: Parent conferencing, home-to-school communication

Time: 10-20 minutes of a 60-minute interview

Materials: Role-play exercise prompt, Interpersonal Skills Scoring Sheet

1 Present Background Information

Interviewer Notes/Comments

- Interviewer: You will participate in a role-play of a meeting with a parent. [Name of interviewer participating in role-play] will be playing the role of the "parent" and will begin the conversation. You should respond and continue conversation in the manner that best represents how you would deal with such a situation as a principal of this school. Before beginning, I will share some important background information.
 - [Mr./Mrs.] Talbot has requested to meet with you concerning the academic performance of [his/her] daughter, Jade, in Mrs. Riley's 5th grade classroom.
 - This is your first face-to-face meeting with [Mr./Mrs.] Talbot.

You may make up any details needed during the course of the role-play, but please do not alter these baseline facts or any facts presented by [interviewer participating in role-play].

- 2 Begin Conversation
 - **Interviewer:** Thank you for meeting with me today. I was really upset to see Jade's grade in math this past quarter. She never struggled this much in 4th grade when she was in Mr. Simon's class.
- 3 Drive Role-Play Conversation
 - Interviewer Note: The content and cadence of the roleplay conversation depends on how the candidate responds to the initial prompt. As conversation continues, another interviewer in the room should be recording notes and watching for specific behaviors listed on the Interpersonal Skills Scoring Sheet.

Role-Play Exercise Example #2



Topics: Faculty management, de-escalation, conflict mediation

Time: 10-20 minutes of a 60-minute interview

Materials: Role-play exercise prompt, Interpersonal Skills Scoring Sheet

1 Present Background Information

Interviewer Notes/Comments

- Interviewer: You will participate in a role-play of a meeting with a teacher. [Name of interviewer participating in role-play] will be playing the role of the "teacher" and will begin the conversation. You should respond and continue conversation in the manner that best represents how you would deal with such a situation as a principal of this school. Before beginning, I will share some important background information.
 - Jamie, the teacher with which you are meeting, abruptly walked out of a faculty meeting after demonstrating frustration with another teacher's call for increased behavior management in Jamie's classroom.
 - Jamie is a 20-year veteran teacher. Cathy, a 2nd year teacher, was describing how students in Jamie's classroom are consistently wandering the hallway and making noise.
 - You are meeting with Jamie 15 minutes after the end of the faculty meeting.

You may make up any details needed during the course of the role-play, but please do not alter these baseline facts or any facts presented by [interviewer participating in role-play].

2 Begin Conversation

- Interviewer: I've had it with Cathy. She came into this school without any regard for those of us who've been here for decades. How dare she question my expertise my students are happy in my class!
- 3 Drive Role-Play Conversation
 - Interviewer Note: The content and cadence of the roleplay conversation depends on how the candidate responds to the initial prompt. As conversation continues, another interviewer in the room should be recording notes and watching for specific behaviors listed on the Interpersonal Skills Scoring Sheet.

Role-Play Exercise Template



Topics:

Time: 10-20 minutes of a 60-minute interview

Materials: Role-play exercise prompt, Interpersonal Skills Scoring Sheet

1 Present Background Information	Interviewer Notes/Comments
2 Begin Conversation	
3 Drive Role-Play Conversation	
Interviewer Note: The content and cadence of the role- play conversation depends on how the candidate responds to the initial prompt. As conversation continues, another interviewer in the room should be recording notes and watching for specific behaviors listed on the	
Interpersonal Skills Scoring Sheet.	eah.com

Interpersonal Skills Scoring Sheet

N/A - Not demonstrated 1 - Weak demonstrat	ion	2 -	Average demonstr	ation	3 - Excellent demonstration
Role-Play Exercise	N/A	1	2	3	Interviewer
Empathy & Emotional Expression	14/11	•			Notes/Comments
Demonstrates appropriate body language (avoids sighing or fidgeting, rolling eyes, throwing up hands, etc.)					
▶ Does not overreact or become impatient					
Asks open-ended questions to uncover additional facts					
▶ Does not interrupt or talk to much					
► Takes time to listen to those involved					
Expresses belief that a solution can be found					
	Sı	ıb Sc	ore:		
Clarity & Communication					
Confronts the problem rather than avoiding it					
Restates or summarizes key issues of concern expressed by those present					
States rationale for actions and attempts to build buy-in					
	Sı	ıb Sc	ore:		
Leadership					
Expresses beliefs and thoughts with confidence					
Does not permit intimidation (does not overly apologize or become overly compliant)					
Displays confidence through eye contact and voice control					
Avoids apologizing for or excusing their instructional methods					
	Sı	ıb Sc	ore:		
See next page for guidanc	ce on in	terpret	ting scores	To	tal Score:

Case Interview Scoring Sheet (cont.)



Interpreting Scores -

Total Score:

Score Range Strategic & Analytical Thinking Maturity Stage
32 - 39 Advanced: Candidate achieves a high standard of interpersonal and social skill at a level proficient for principal leadership. Minimal additional training required.
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Additional Notes During Deliberation:

