

Capacity Interview Toolkit

Tool #5: Sample Interview Questions

*The most effective interview questions are (1) specific to the application and (2) focus on the capacity of the people in front of you.*

*The following* ***Sample Interview Questions*** *are grouped by question type and application section. You will not be able to ask all of these questions in any one interview, nor should you try. Decide which topics are the most important for you to explore, based on the application, and then consider using a few of the questions below to help get the conversation started in those areas.*

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## scenario questions

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| Scenario #1: You are examining standardized test data from your first year of operation. Let’s say that you made only 3% growth in ELA and Math instead of reaching your target of 10% growth. Both the board and the staff must decide how to proceed. The board and the school leadership team should each meet separately. | |
| Board Options:   1. Require the school leadership team to submit an action plan to the board. 2. Give the school leaders another year before taking action since one year isn’t enough time. 3. Remove the principal | Staff Options:   1. Adjust some of the principal’s responsibilities so that she can spend more time providing support. 2. Remove struggling teachers. 3. Put struggling teachers on support plans and monitor their performance closely. 4. Do nothing. |

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| Scenario #2: Despite exhaustive recruiting efforts, only 150 of the 300 students you seek to serve have registered to attend your school. What do you do? Explain why. |
| Options:   1. Survey families to see why they aren’t choosing your school and make adjustments to meet their needs. 2. Target a different group of students. 3. Reduce your enrollment target. |

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| Scenario #3: Your school has completed its first year of operation. Of the 80 twelfth graders enrolled in your school, only 25% are graduating with a technical degree or IBC. As a board, you need to decide how to proceed. The school leader may not participate in the conversation since he/she is not a board member. What do you do? Explain why. |
| Options:   1. Remove the school leader. 2. Set up a series of intensive reflections with the school leader to see if the board can provide her guidance that she can use to get the school on track. 3. Hire a school leader coach |

## Application-based questions

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| Chevron arrows | Introduction |
|  | * If approved, what are the biggest challenges you will have between now and opening day? |
|  | * Walk me through what a typical day will look like for a student in the [highest year offered in the first year]. |
|  | * What are the greatest strengths of the school? |
|  | * What do you see as the greatest strengths of your application? |

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| Chevron arrows | Educational Plan/School Design |
|  | **Mission and Vision** |
|  | * What is the school’s mission and vision? |
|  | * How will you measure success? |
|  | * During the first year, how will the governing body and the Principal know whether the school is doing well? |
|  | * After four years, how will the governing body and the Principal know whether the school is doing well? |
|  | * What will be the primary characteristics of the school if it is successful? |
|  | **Student Population** |
|  | * What do you expect the student population to look like? |
|  | * How does your missing align with your target student population? |
|  | **Curriculum and Instruction** |
|  | * How was the curriculum selected? *(if applicable)* |
|  | * What is the plan for selecting (or developing) the curriculum? |
|  | * What types of remediation do you expect students to need? |
|  | * What is the plan for working with students who are not meeting expectations? |
|  | * Who provides tutoring / enrichment? When will tutoring happen? |
|  | * How will you make ability grouping decisions? How often (and how) will those decisions be re-evaluated? |
|  | * How do your proposed goals align with the expected levels of school performance set out by the authorizer? |
|  | **Special Populations** |
|  | * What is your plan for working with English Language Learners? |
|  | * How will you communicate with students and parents whose first language is not English? |
|  | * What is your plan for working with students with disabilities? |
|  | * How will you ensure that students with disabilities are still learning even if they are in in-school suspension or are suspended? |
|  | * How will you approach the sometimes complex issues that accompany students who have an IEP and multiple diagnoses? |
|  | **Discipline** |
|  | * What will you do with students who exhaust all options in your discipline plan? |
|  | * How will you make suspension/expulsion decisions? |
|  | * How will teachers be trained on the discipline plan? |
|  | * What evidence is there that your method of discipline will be effective with your anticipated student population? |
|  | * What will you do if there are potential legal consequences for student conduct? |
|  | **Parent and Community Engagement** |
|  | * How will you engage the community in your school (and vice versa)? |
|  | * What efforts have you made to build relationships in the community to date? |
|  | **Recruitment and Marketing** |
|  | * How will you ensure that students from deprived and disadvantaged families have an opportunity to attend your school? |
|  | * Why would parents want to enroll their students in your school? |
|  | * Why would students want to enroll in your school? |

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| Chevron arrows | Organizational Plan |
|  | **Governance** |
|  | * What are the governing body’s responsibilities? |
|  | * How will you recruit governing body members to fill identified skill gaps? |
|  | * How will you (governing body members) evaluate the Principal? |
|  | * What opportunities/avenues will there be for parental involvement and input in the school’s governance? |
|  | * How will the governing body know if the school is on track? What would you do if it is not on track? |
|  | **Leadership** |
|  | * What makes your school’s Principal uniquely qualified to lead your school? *(if applicable)* |
|  | * What are the primary qualifications you are looking for in the [TITLE]? *(Insert the title of a relevant position, such as Director of Curriculum. This type of question is especially useful where the school expects to have non-traditional administrative positions and roles.)* |
|  | **Staffing** |
|  | * What kinds of teachers do you need to implement this program well? |
|  | * What is your plan for recruiting them? |
|  | **Professional Development** |
|  | * What type of professional development will you need to do before starting school? |
|  | * What kind of professional development will you provide on an on-going basis? |
|  | **Teacher Evaluation** |
|  | * How, and for what purpose, will teachers be evaluated? |
|  | **Facilities** |
|  | * What buildings have you explored or identified? |
|  | * What are your essential building needs? |
|  | * What is your ideal building? |
|  | * What will be the transportation options to and from your desired location? |

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| Chevron arrows | Financial Plan |
|  | **Start Up Costs** |
|  | * In the first three years, what parts of the budget depend on grants and other supplemental funding? |
|  | **Financial Viability** |
|  | * What is the plan for achieving financial sustainability? |
|  | **Financial Capacity** |
|  | * Who will be responsible for financial systems and management? |
|  | * If it is a management company, how will the board provide oversight? * Have the board and management company discussed specific terms of an agreement? |
|  | * Who will monitor the school’s finances on a regular basis and how? |
|  | * *[If there are significant costs that are not addressed in the budget, you should ask about these. Common areas are professional development, SPED staffing, and after-school or summer school programs.]* |

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| Chevron arrows | Questions for Existing Operators and  Schools Contracting with Education Service Providers |
|  | **Educational Program Design** |
|  | * How will your educational program change to serve the local student population? *(if applicable)* |
|  | * How will those changes impact your [DESIGN COMPONENT]? *(Insert components of the design that may be impacted, such as budget, staffing, professional development, etc.)* |