

The



that really matter

Preparation for an interview should focus on the fundamental things the board members truly want to know about you. Answers to these questions underlie the intent of most or all of the interview questions:

- Do you have a sincere interest in their district?
- Do you have the expertise necessary to be an excellent superintendent?
- Do your personality and leadership approach fit their needs?
- Do your skills, abilities, and values match the culture of the district?

Although you will be asked many different questions, if you scrutinize them carefully, you will see that they are a variety of approaches to learning how you measure up in these key categories.

1. Do you have a genuine interest in their district?

Every board wants to believe you truly want to be their district's leader. This is why it is crucial that you clearly demonstrate that you've learned as much as possible about the district's unique attributes, community expectations, board priorities, student achievement or lack thereof, and other pertinent issues. The more you knowledge you display the better. It is particularly impressive to reference insights beyond test scores and budget highlights. It is also smart to point out how your prior experiences and training are particularly relevant to the districts needs and goals; for example, if they are planning a bond measure on a future ballot and you've led a successful effort, be sure to point it out.

Prepare solid answers for these questions, and use appropriate opportunities to share your responses, even if they are not specifically asked:

- Why do you want to lead our district?
- Why do you think you are right for this job?
- What do you see as our greatest needs?

2. Do you have the capacity to do the job?

Think about the key skills needed for the job and assess your own level of expertise and experience in that context. It makes sense to identify the more specific or technical skills that your potential employer might expect as well as some more generic skills such as being a good communicator, having good IT skills, being a team player, etc. This information will help you answer many different interview questions without getting sidetracked into talking about things that are not relevant. Remember that you want to demonstrate that you fully understand what is involved and that you have the full range of abilities to do the job well. Always go back to the key skills, expertise and experience when answering open-ended, worrisome or sometimes out-of-the blue questions.

3. Are you a fit for the board?

Employers do not hire someone they do not like. Board members look for a personality and style that meets their needs. They want an individual with whom they can work comfortably and effectively. They need to feel there will be a strong, positive relationship.

Board members, particularly those with experience or who have been disappointed in the approach of a prior superintendent, seek a person whose approach to the board/superintendent relationship corresponds with their requisites and expectations. Some boards are comfortable with limited involvement in district management and work well with a superintendent who sees the board role as limited to policy and decisions within their legal purview. Others expect to be part of the management of the district and to function as a board/superintendent team, which demands someone who can concede some control and feel comfortable with collaboration and more open communication.

As a practical matter, it is wise to answer these questions honestly because a mismatch is likely to lead to tension and sometimes significant problems in the relationship:

- How would you describe your work style?
- What makes you a good team member?
- Describe the idea board/superintendent relationship.

4. Are you a fit for their district?

It is very important to board members that they can be proud of their choice. They are elected officials and throughout the interview they will be assessing how you as a person fit into the district and the community. Districts manifest unique cultures, with their own unique attitudes, behaviors, priorities, and outlooks. It is important to both you and the stakeholders to understand and appreciate each other. Some aspects are readily apparent and others are revealed in nuances and subtleties. Compare what you learn to your own traits, values, beliefs, and style. Assuming you the district environment offers what you need for success, adapt appropriate answers for these types of questions:

- What motivates you?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How would your colleagues describe you?
- What makes you fit our district?