

## Turnaround School Leader Selection Tools

Effective school leaders significantly influence student learning and other aspects of school performance. Research consistently affirms this need for strong leadership; therefore it is important that schools are purposeful in their selection of an effective principal. Please contact Andrea Danielson at [andrea.danielson@state.mn.us](mailto:andrea.danielson@state.mn.us) or 651-582-8653 with questions or to receive more information regarding this toolkit.

These resources include a sampling of principal selection tools from a variety of sources to assist in selecting an effective school leader. The following resources are included in the school leader selection toolkit:

- Turnaround Leader FAQ
- Sample Job Posting
- Sample Interview Invitation to Candidates
- Interview Step-by-Step Procedure
- Potential Interview Questions

## **Turnaround Leader Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

### **What is a turnaround leader?**

A comprehensive turnaround relies heavily upon an infusion of human capital, beginning with the principal. Changes in decision-making and operational practice are part of this process. The principal, as the instructional leader, has the responsibility to lead the school team in the planning and decision making efforts. Operational flexibility (staffing, calendars/time and budgeting) assists the principal in the implementation of embedding professional staff development, use of data related to student achievement, and other requirements of the selected turnaround model.

### **Why is it so important to have the right person leading the school?**

Research suggests that effective school leaders significantly influence student learning and other aspects of school performance. Public Impact guides reference the importance of a leadership pattern of thinking, feeling, acting and speaking, or competencies; which serve as a measurable distinguisher between very high performers and more typical leaders in a turnaround setting. The selection process is an opportunity to select a leader who demonstrates this strong leadership patterns even if they have not yet turned around a school.

### **What qualifications should the turnaround leader possess?**

A cross-section of research on turnaround leader actions identifies two critical competencies:

- Achievement
  - Does the candidate strive to achieve the best and move forward with goals despite barriers?
  - Is there evidence of prioritizing actions, directing, and mobilizing the staff while making good use of available resources?
- Impact and Influence
  - Is there evidence of acting with purpose to affect the perceptions, thinking, and actions of others?
  - Does the candidate share examples of building coalitions to create support?
  - Can the candidate empathize with others, anticipate responses and then move forward with words and actions to achieve an intended impact?

Secondary critical competencies include:

- Monitoring and Directiveness
  - Is there evidence of setting expectations and holding others accountable for their performance?
  - Is the candidate direct in their expectations of high performance from others, clear about transparency and the need to monitor efforts against a standard, as well as prepared to deal with failure to perform?
- Team Leadership
  - Is there evidence of leadership? Does the candidate talk about keeping others informed, paying attention to morale and team performance, look for opportunities to motivate staff while being aware of and seeking additional resources to support the work?
  - Does the candidate indicate vision and enthusiasm?
- Self-Confidence
  - Does the candidate believe in their own ability to accomplish the tasks and actions required of a turnaround leader?

**What are some look-fors?**

*School Turnaround Leaders: Competencies for Success*, a guide published by Public Impact, attempts to identify underlying characteristics including:

- Driving for Results – a strong desire to achieve results.
- Influencing for Results – motivates others, influencing to obtain results.
- Problem Solving – thinking applies to organizational goals and challenges.
- Confidence to Lead – staying visibly focused, committed, and self-assured.

School Turnaround Leaders: Competencies for Success (2008) Public Impact  
School Improvement Grants 1003(g) (2010) USDE Department of Education

## Sample Job Description for Posting

Currently seeking a transformational leader for the position of \_\_\_\_\_Principal at \_\_\_\_\_ School. The principal provides site-level leadership for all school programs and collaborates with system-level leaders to achieve our mission.

### **Analyze Results and Take Action**

Ensure improved student achievement by analyzing data, setting high performance goals, monitoring standards for achievement, aligning school resources, and prioritizing activities to achieve maximum results.

### **Provide Impact and Influence**

Establish a culture of learning and continuous improvement by communicating a vision for success, engaging stakeholders, and motivating others to take action. Develop others by providing instruction, expressing positive expectations, providing developmental feedback, selecting training and work assignments, to build capacity and delegating as necessary.

### **Lead with Confidence**

Champion system mission, core values, and strategic objectives. Ensure a collaborative culture by expecting teams to set standards for their work, examine data regarding effectiveness, and take action to meet the standards. Develop effective processes to plan for continuous improvement, solve problems, and to achieve desired results.

### **Job Requirements:**

- Licensure as Minnesota K-12 or \_\_\_\_\_ principal.
- Successful administrative experience as a principal, assistant principal, or system-level administrator.

### **Additional Qualification Wording (optional):**

- Visionary Leader who uses data to inform decisions and drive for results.
- Change Agent who takes action and interacts with people to optimize success.
- Problem-solver with the ability to motivate others and inspire shared leadership.
- Confident leader who comfortably engages students, parents, staff and community members as stakeholders in education.
- Operational leader who is skillful in resource management.
- Successful teacher at the level appropriate to the principal position posted with strong instructional skills and knowledge base in curriculum and instruction.
- A Reader with a comprehensive knowledge of educational and social research.

## Sample Interview Invitation to Candidates

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ School Candidate,

The \_\_\_\_\_ School interviews for the principal position are scheduled \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_.  
Your interview is \_\_\_\_\_ a.m. Please check in at the district office located at \_\_\_\_\_.  
The interview is a combination of oral and written responses. The oral interview is expected to be \_\_\_\_\_ minutes. The written essay is expected to be 20 minutes. A panel of \_\_\_\_\_ interviewers will pose questions and score the responses against a rubric. The questions will be based on past performances. Please be prepared to respond appropriately. The interview team expects all responses to include:

- Situation: What was the situation you faced? What did you need to accomplish?  
What were the circumstances?
- Task: What did you need to accomplish to deal with the situation?
- Action: What actions were taken?
- Result: What was the outcome? Were the tasks accomplished? Did the actions solve the situation? What was learned from the experience?

The attached document is the \_\_\_\_\_ Plan. Please review this before the interview. You may bring artifacts to showcase, such as \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.

Directly following the interview, it is encouraged to schedule a tour of the \_\_\_\_\_ School site. If you wish to tour, please email a head of time so that arrangements can be made. The \_\_\_\_\_ School Interview Team looks forward to meeting you. If you have any questions, please contact \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

## Interview Step-by-Step Procedure

**\*Replace “HR” with the title/name of the staff member assigned each task.**

1. HR provides candidate file to Interview Team and summarizes:
  - Level of Education
  - Work Experiences
2. HR calls in candidate to the room for the interview and welcomes them.
3. HR introduces the Interview Team.
4. HR completes an interview overview to the candidate.
  - The interview process will consist of the following:
    - i. *Number of* questions. This set for *number of* minutes.
    - ii. One writing sample completed in 20 minutes.
5. Before we start the formal interview, please tell us, briefly the reason you are interested in working as principal at “\_\_\_\_\_ School District”. This response is not graded.
6. Please answer all questions.
  - You may refer to the PowerPoint, which lists the questions.
  - A member of the team may ask clarifying questions.
  - Please make sure you respond to all parts of the question.
  - If you have supporting documents, you can refer to them during the Q & A.
  - You have approximately *number of* minutes for the first *number of* questions.
  - After completing the question interview, you will complete the written portion.  
You will have 20 minutes to complete this.
7. Candidate responds to the questions presented.
8. Questions/Answers open as time allows.
9. Interviewers take notes. These notes are not shared. If there is a standstill of time, HR will facilitate the conversation and set the next question up.
10. HR will close the interview and escort the candidate to a room to complete the essay.
11. After the candidate is no longer present, the interview team can comment or ask questions.
12. Interviewers complete scores (scores may change later upon reflection).

13. HR collects scores and the candidate's written response.
  14. HR closes interview with candidate informing the candidate of process and timeline.
  15. HR gives team the written response for their review.
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### **Interview Writing Sample**

- Identify key areas for the school's professional growth based on the MCA results for the school, the needs assessment and the census data.
- Write a school SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, results-based, time-bound) goal given the above data.
- Develop an action plan.
- Identify specific benchmarks that will demonstrate the progress or attainment of outcomes.

## Potential Interview Questions

### STAR Behavioral-based Questions

- Describe a time you established a vision for school programs, i.e., after school, athletics, intervention, leadership team, etc...What process was used?
- Describe a time when you provided your staff with the freedom to determine their progress, within the parameters of the project. How did you evaluate the project and result, even though you would have preferred that they do it another way?
- Tell about a time you encouraged your staff to be actively involved in solving problems related to their positions rather than coming to you for the answers.
- Describe a time when you identified a potential safety issue and addressed it before a problem occurred.
- Describe a time when you successfully included the community into school programs.
- Give an example of how your understanding of a community issue helped you address a school problem.
- Tell about a specific time when you had to handle a tough problem that challenged your sense of fairness or involved an ethical issue.
- Give an example of a complex political situation that you were not able to handle effectively. In reflection, what could you have done differently to prevent it?
- How do your goals fit into the mission of this school to lead, teach, and learn?
- Describe an effective classroom.
- On what basis do you judge your success as a principal?
- You caught a student smoking an illegal substance for the second time, what do you do?

- Give some examples of strategies you have for dealing with conflict resolution among staff members.
- How would you get the staff, parent, students, and community involved in the decision-making process that impacts the school?

Taken from the *School Turnaround Leaders: Selection Toolkit* (2008) Public Impact, Selection Preparation, page 9. View [Public Impact Selection Toolkit](#).

- Think about a time when you felt very successful or proud of something you accomplished at work, and tell me the story.
- Think about a time when you accomplished something satisfying at work despite one or more obstacles. Tell me the story.
- Think about a time when you set a standard for someone else's work and held that person accountable for adhering to that standard, and tell me the story.
- Think about a time when you had to think ahead to accomplish something satisfying at work. Tell me the story. (Make sure to clarify time frame: When did the thinking ahead occur in relation to the anticipated events in the future? How far in advance?)
- Think about a time when you influenced another person or people in a way that was satisfying to you, and tell me the story.
- Think about a time when you led a group or team of people to accomplish work that was satisfying to you, and tell me the story.
- Think about a time when you had to solve a problem or figure something out that involved a lot of information, data or steps. Tell me the story.

- Think about a time when you were confronted with a lot of information and had to figure out what was most important. Tell me the story.
- Tell me about a time when another person or people stood in your way to get something done and you addressed the situation to your satisfaction. Tell me the story.

### **Additional Questions**

- From your teaching experience, describe a lesson from beginning to end. What measures did you use to determine the level of your student's learning?
- What do you look for in a teaching episode when you are observing teachers? How do you give feedback to teachers?
- Relay a situation that describes your relationships with students.
- What process do you use to develop a comprehensive understanding of a school's curriculum?
- Explain your decision-making process.
- Give examples of data and how you have used data in your work.
- What processes do you use to involve teachers, parents and students in the decisions that impact the school?
- Describe your reading habits. How do you stay current with educational research? Give an example of something that you read or have read that has affected your work practice.
- What means and resources do you use to support the teachers and their work?