

What are your thoughts on team-teaching?

Answer - I am sure many of you have participated in team-teaching and realize the benefits of this strategy. The interviewer who asks this question wants to discover, if you are flexible, enjoy working in a team environment, have experience in this area, and what your viewpoints are on the subject.

It is always wise to speak about some of the positive aspects of team-teaching, such as:

It is an effective strategy for teaching large groups of students. Encourages teachers to collaborate and generate ideas ... two heads is always better than one! Talk about team-teaching experiences you have had, and the positive results that transpired.

If you haven't had any hands-on experience, you may explain that you enjoy working in a team setting and are excited about the possibility of participating in this approach. OR, maybe you have done some reading on the subject and can share some of the insights you gained with the interviewer ... this will definitely be impressive!

Furthermore, it is vitally important to be honest when answering all questions during the interview. Organizing your thoughts in advance will serve to help you deliver truthful and concise responses, while highlighting the skills you possess that are most compatible with the needs of the school or district.

Back to top

Question 2 - What are your greatest strengths?

Answer - This question will probably be asked. Now, if you researched the district/school and found out what they are looking for in a candidate, you will be able to focus your response on that information, keeping in mind it is important to tell the truth. With every response you must show your VALUE to the district. This will also give them an idea on how you view your talents and skills as a teacher. Perception is critical... you must be able to confidently discuss your skills using a convincing approach.

It is important the answer shows your hard/tangible skills. For example, classroom management, curriculum development, or technology integration. These skills will show the interviewer(s) what you can do on the job. Don't stop there, you will set yourself apart from the pack if you can back up your claims with actual stories. This will build credibility... it shows you really are good at what you are claiming. Tell them about what you have done to incorporate technology into the classroom and what was the result. The result part of the story sells value... and that produces job offers.

Back to top

Question 3 - What is your biggest weakness?

Answer - Your response could include something that may have been a challenge in the past, which you have taken steps to rectify. It is important to be truthful, they will be testing your honesty. In addition, they will be checking to see if you provide a weakness that is critical to success in the position. For example, the interview will likely end quickly if you answer you have a difficult time management the classroom. The key to answering the question is to turn a negative into a positive.

I don't suggest using that the traditional statement, "I'm a perfectionist", it is often overused, and will tend to sound phony. It is important you don't get defensive and try to justify why you are weak in a particular subject area, such as social studies. This would make a bad impression, because it may be relevant to the position that you are seeking. Whatever you decide to use, ensure it is not one of the key skills of the position you are seeking. In other words, don't pinpoint classroom discipline and/management or subject area if you are seeking a teaching position.

Think of this question as an opportunity to sell yourself. Here is an example: You wouldn't say, "I have a difficult time organizing my day." Instead, rephrase the answer by saying, "There are so many creative activities I plan for my students and class time is limited. It is difficult to incorporate all of the activities that I would like my students to learn from. Over time, I have realized to prioritize what lessons are the most important to enhance my student learning. I now realize that I can't do everything I would like to."

The above example shows you are excited about designing new and creative lessons for your students. In their mind, this will not be a negative. It will position you that much closer to getting a job offer.

Back to top

Question 4 - Let's imagine an interview for a grade one teaching position and the interviewer asks: "Describe your classroom's physical appearance." Having prepared ahead of time, you understand the interviewer[s] attempt to determine:

- Your teaching style,
- Your ability to effectively manage the class,
- The level and quality of student interaction,
- Your teaching philosophy,

Answer - Within this context, you might respond:

"Upon entering my classroom you will find a lively and colorful room completely centered upon children and active learning. Sight words, the alphabet, numbers, and inspirational quotes cover the walls while large bulletin boards proudly display students' work. A large area contains a carpeted reading or group corner specifically for storytelling, show-and-tell, weather discussions and calendar and day-of-the-week conversations. This classroom includes an abundance of age appropriate reading materials and student mailboxes where children place personal journals, home reading books and workbooks in the morning and then collect newsletters or other parent communication at the end of the day."

NOTE:

Presenting floor plans successfully used in the past demonstrates strong organization and preparation skills. Indicate various potential seating plans used throughout the year and offer pictures of your old classrooms as a way means to provide the principal and interviewing board a first-hand view of your potential classroom...As the saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words."

Remember, each person's answer will vary depending upon teaching style and philosophy. The district representatives will look to see if your style is compatible with their needs. Thoroughly researching each specific district needs will allow you to tailor your answers which is the key to a successful interview.

Back to top

Question 5 - Why do you want to work for our school district?

Answer - Your preparation and research is imperative to successfully answer this question. Provide a few reasons why you're interested in the school or district, and what in particular sparked your interest. What is your personal experience with the school or district? What do you know about its student body, faculty members, industry reputation, community involvement, educational goals and objectives, upcoming initiatives, demographics, or extracurricular activities? This information will help you to accurately respond to the above question. The word accurate is important -- don't answer the questions by using old information

The interviewer is looking for evidence that you really know why you want to work there or did you just send out applications and hope for the best. This research will also help immensely when answering other questions throughout the interview, so plan to dedicate some time and energy doing this homework. Effective research will help to tailor your answers, without being deceiving, to the question above. It is wrong to tailor your answer with incorrect information - preparation and honesty is the key to a successful interview.

Back to top

Question 6 - How do you handle classroom discipline?

Answer - For obvious reasons everyone will have a different answer; it will depend on your teaching style, grade interviewing for, and past experiences. The interviewer will be looking to see if you have a plan, you know how to implement it, and if you think that discipline is an important part of the position. What I have found from coaching clients is they fail to provide a clear action plan that can be backed up with examples. Also it is important to find out what is the philosophy of the school or district, this will give you some additional information. A few things to bring up when answering this question is the following:

It is important to develop ground rules the first week of class, this allows the students to understand what is and isn't acceptable behavior.

These rules are discussed and agreed upon with the students, this makes the students accountability and responsible. You may want to touch on your philosophy of classroom discipline. This of course would depend on your style; you will have to be honest with yourself. But you may believe that you reduce negative behavior by offering the students a intellectually stimulating, organized, and respectful environment.

You will want to get an example of your plan; use a real situation to show your expertise in this very important area. Whether you use the red light/green light, time-outs, or removing the student from the classroom, it is important that you can back up why it is effective and use examples. You will want to explain why you feel the discipline action is effective and why you enjoy using it.

It is also important to indicate there are always two sides to every story, so if the action involves discipline of two students, you must listen to both sides. Indicate that you try to get the students to resolve their own disagreements, which may involve compromise. And end the discussion by asking them, "How will you handle the situation next time?"

Again, you must be honest when answering this question or any other question during the interview, but by organizing your thoughts and stories will make your response concise, truthful, and show your skills to the district.

Back to top

Question 7 - How would you describe a successful principal?

Answer - By asking this question, the hiring committee is attempting to assess the following:

- Do you understand what traits contribute to the success of a principal. As a teacher, what traits do you value most.
- Your response may indicate or suggest possible conflicts with the current principal.

Responses to this question may include:

It is important that a successful principal...

- has a vision and a plan to reach that vision...combined with the ability to bring faculty members together to form a cooperative team and motivate them to reach district goals and objectives.
- be visible... the principal's presence should be evident on a continual basis. He or she must be easily accessible to both students and teachers.
- has a great sense of humor, and can relate well to a diverse group of individuals.
- genuinely cares about the students, teachers, parents, and the district.

Back to top

Question 8 - Do you have any questions for us?

Answer - An interview isn't just about responding to the prospective school district's questions; it is an opportunity for you to impress the panel with examples of your foresight regarding the position they are offering. By asking questions, you can also determine if the fit is right, it shows interest in the position, and helps to develop rapport. If you feel comfortable, and the interviewer seems amenable, you may ask questions at appropriate times throughout the interview. Once you have been in the interview for a few minutes, you will start to get a feel for your comfort level in this regard. If you don't ask questions during the interview, you will most likely be given the chance to do so at the end of the interview ... be sure to take advantage of this great opportunity!

So what questions should you ask? First, only ask questions you cannot get answers to through research, for example, by investigating, you may easily determine how many students attend the school -- so, think of a different question to ask. Be sure you think carefully about what questions you would like answered ... make them genuine ... and recognize that it is always advantageous to ask questions. Remember, don't try to dominate the interview with your questions, keep in mind you are the

interviewee. A good idea is to practice asking the questions you created in front of a mirror the day before the meeting. Write your questions down on a professional pad of paper or an index card and bring them to the interview.

Some suggestions of appropriate questions are provided here ... ask them only if they are not addressed in the interview and if you don't have access to the answers. If the questions are structured correctly, you will provide yourself with a further opportunity to sell yourself, for example; "I am very interested in team sports, what extracurricular activities are available for teacher participation?" What does this show the interviewer? You are a team player and are willing to participate in extra-curricular activities.

Other potential questions are:

- I have always been successful with getting parents involved in the classroom, how active are parents at this school or within the school district?
- I am well-versed at integrating computer technology into the classroom, what kind of resources does the school have available?
- Do teachers work in teams? If so, how is this organized?
- I consider myself a life-long learner, what professional development opportunities will be available?
- What is the student/teacher ratio?
- I have been instrumental in developing new programs in previous positions I have held. Will the school be implementing any new programs this year, or require input to develop programs already in place?
- Will the school be addressing any major issues this year?
- If you are new to the industry you may ask, "Is there a mentor teacher program available?"

- When do you hope to reach a decision as to who the successful candidate will be, or what is the next step in the hiring process?

This is just a sample of the many types of questions you may ask in an interview. Be sure you don't overwhelm the interviewer with questions ... three or four questions is usually sufficient.

Furthermore, it is important to be honest when answering all questions during the interview, by organizing your thoughts in advance will serve you in delivering truthful and concise responses, while illustrating your skills and compatibility to the district.