



Sample Interview Questions and Approaches— Teacher and Administrator Positions at the Middle Level

National Middle School Association surveyed middle schools to determine the questions and approaches they use when interviewing for teacher and administrator positions. We hope some of these will be helpful to you.

One school administrator refers to an article in the March 2004 *Middle School Journal*, “Hiring the Best Middle School Teachers with Behavior-Based Interviewing.” This principal remarks, “I found that article well after I had spent time developing my own process. However, my questionnaire now includes a couple of questions from that article.”

One school uses a pre-interview questionnaire to assist in initial screening of candidates:

1. Briefly describe activities you have implemented that reflect your philosophy of education as it relates to middle school students.
2. As you design a lesson and/or unit, what are necessary elements that must be present?
3. In addition to tests, what procedures do you use for evaluating student progress?
4. What methods do you use to keep parents and students informed of progress?
5. Why do you want to be considered for a position at this school?

Teacher Interview Questions

• Background and Introduction

- Tell us about yourself. (Include information about high school, college, activities, honors, student teaching assignment, work experience. etc.)
- What are your endorsements?
- Explain your experience as it relates to this position.
- What are your career goals (short and long term goals)?
- Why do you want to teach middle school?
- What characteristics do you have that will help you to work with colleagues or students who are different from you?
- Why did you select [subject] as your major area of study?
- What experiences have you had, both in your teacher education program and in other jobs or volunteer work, that have helped to prepare you to become a teacher?

• Students

- Describe some characteristics of middle level students.
- What makes you well-suited to teach middle level students?
- Describe your experience working with special education students.
- Describe your experience working with English language learners
- How do kids learn?
- What three expectations do you have of your students?

• Instruction, Curriculum and Assessment

- Give several examples of how you have instructionally designed your lessons to meet the varying ability levels of your students (low, average, high).
- How do you organize an effective lesson (planning, sequence, support, appropriate, engaging, etc.)?

- Tell us more about your instructional style. How do you teach? What would we see in your classroom?
 - How do you teach reading in your content area?
 - How do you incorporate technology into your instruction?
 - How do you incorporate thinking skills into your class?
 - When kids forget all the details of your subject, what are the main concepts you want them to remember?
 - How do you utilize different teaching strategies to best provide for the learning needs of all students?
 - Discuss ways you assess student learning. (How do you measure student learning and/or check for understanding?)
 - What is the purpose of homework?
 - Describe a typical homework assignment.
 - How do you select resources? Why would you use a textbook?
 - A math teacher on your team is teaching a unit on measurement. How could you relate this to the topic being taught in your class?
 - What is the goal of your instruction?
 - How do you motivate the unmotivated?
 - What is unique about your approach to teaching?
- **Classroom management**
 - Explain how you structure the 55 minutes of a class period.
 - How do you begin each class?
 - Discuss your classroom and/or team discipline plan.
 - Tell us how you have handled a student that was repeatedly disruptive in the classroom.
- **Classroom and School Community**
 - How do you promote acceptance, tolerance and diversity in your classroom?
 - What are some ways you involve parents in your instruction?
 - Whether on a team or in a special area, it is important that colleagues reflect a sense of teamwork. Describe ways you contribute to collegial support and staff morale.
 - Aside from the instructional delivery of the curriculum in the classroom, how have you had (or how do you see yourself having) a positive influence on the lives of your students?
- **Situations**
 - Think of a time when a student did not understand a concept/or a student was capable of performing well beyond the academic expectations of the class. How did you respond?
 - How would you approach a parent who was upset and/or angry?
 - Describe the toughest student/students you have had to deal with, and how you resolved the situation.
 - Tell me about a lesson or unit you developed for this grade or subject, and how you implemented it.
 - Describe a lesson you have taught that was particularly successful/unsuccessful. What did you do as a result of evaluating the lesson?
- **Professional identity, care and development**
 - What do you read to stay current in your field?
 - What are your long-term professional goals?
 - What did you learn this year that will make you a better teacher next year?
 - What do you do to combat stress?
 - Would you be interested in a high school position in your subject area should it become available?
 - Think of your best teachers. What positive characteristics do you believe these teachers demonstrated? Which of these characteristics do you believe you have?

- What three words would your students use to describe you?
- What do you feel is your greatest strength? Weakness?
- Why do you feel that you are the best candidate for the position?

Administrator Interview Questions (principal, assistant principal, dean of students)

• Background

- Please explain experience you have had as it relates to this position.
- Tell us about yourself. (Include information about high school, college, activities, honors, student teaching assignment, administrative experience. etc.)
- What are your endorsements?
- Why do you want to be a middle level principal/assistant principal/dean of students?
- What do you perceive as the top priority as a school administrator? For this position?
- Why do you feel that you are the best candidate for the position?
- What makes for a good middle school?

• Students

- Describe some characteristics of middle level students.
- What three expectations do you have of students?
- How do kids learn?
- How have you had a positive influence on the lives of your students as an administrator?
- What should a typical day be like for students in middle school?

• Leadership - General

- Tell us about your leadership style. How do you lead? What would we observe when watching you work with staff?
- What role do you take in team meetings?
- What do you look for when observing teachers?
- Describe how you utilize technology to manage your building.
- What characteristics do you look for in a teacher candidate for your building?
- Describe your experience with building a master schedule.
- What three expectations do you have of your staff?
- Explain your experience in running meetings and leading groups.
- How have you worked with regular education teachers in order to better ensure the success of integrating kids with special needs in regular education classrooms?
- What are the characteristics of a successful school for young adolescents?
- Describe your knowledge and experience in using data to inform decisions.

• Leadership - Instruction/Curriculum

- Describe a curriculum project that you have led in your building as an administrator and your role in the process.
- Describe your experience working with special education programs/students.
- Describe your experience working with English language learners.
- Describe what you consider good assessment.
- What do you see as the Curriculum Director's role in working with your staff?
- What do you consider to be the key components of a good middle level program?
- When you walk into a classroom, how can you tell if learning is going on?
- What do you expect to see in quality lesson plans?

• Leadership – Staff development

- How do you tell someone he or she is not doing a good job?
- How do you decide what staff development is necessary?
- How do you determine what to do on staff development day?



- How do you evaluate the effectiveness of staff development?
 - What does staff development look like in your school?
- **Situations**
 - How would you go about developing and implementing an advisory program in a school where no such program exists?
 - Have you had to develop a shared vision where there had been no vision or different visions? Describe that experience.
 - How do you work with a teacher that repeatedly sends students to the office?
 - How do you work with a parent who is upset and/or angry with a teacher?
 - Describe the toughest student(s) you have dealt with and how you resolved the situation.
 - What steps would you follow if a teacher did not comply with your recommendations after a classroom visit?
 - How do you react when a parent calls and is upset with something one of your teachers has done?
 - How do you react when a parent calls and is upset with something you have done?
- **School Climate and Community**
 - Describe ways you contribute to or facilitate collegial support and staff morale.
 - When dealing with a discipline problem with a student, what is your major concern?
 - How much/what type of input do you solicit from a teacher in dealing with referrals/discipline problems with a student?
 - What kind of discipline plan do you expect from the teachers working under you?
 - When a teacher sends a student to you for discipline what process do you follow?
 - How have you helped others develop discipline, intervention, or behavior plans?
 - Tell us about a time when you had to make a difficult decision, and you knew that whatever you decided, some people would be unhappy.
 - Define “learning community,” and describe what that looks like in your school.
 - What does a safe, supportive, encouraging environment look like in your school?
 - How do you go about creating and nurturing a safe, supportive, encouraging school environment?
 - What role do parents and adult family members have in the school?
 - What do you expect of students’ parents and adult family members?
- **Professional identity, care, and development**
 - What makes you well-suited to work with middle level students in this capacity?
 - What is your greatest strength?
 - Weakness?
 - What three words would your staff use to describe you?
 - What three words would your students use to describe you?
 - What do you read to stay current in your field?
 - What are your long-term professional goals?
 - What do you do to combat stress?
 - What kinds of things are important to you and would definitely be part of your daily schedule?

Share your processes and questions with us by sending a message to Mary Henton, NMSA director of research and development at mhenton@nmsa.org.

