

Competency-Aligned Educator Interview Questions and Activities

Grounding selection in competencies is a reliable way to ensure evidence-based decisions, minimize bias¹, and hire staff who produce the best outcomes for students. Schools should determine the educator competencies that are most essential to success in their contexts, determine specific, observable ways candidates may demonstrate these competencies (indicators), and then map them to the selection model to determine how these competencies will be assessed.

Cross-cultural agility and high expectations are critical competencies to assess: In [The Opportunity Myth](#), we found that teacher expectations significantly influence student learning and that teachers who share their students' racial or ethnic identities have higher expectations. Thus, it's important teachers understand how their identities can influence their instruction and that teachers work to develop and model high expectations for all. Additionally, we recommend the following general selection competencies, as they also correlate to classroom performance²: critical thinking, application of feedback, communication, and professionalism. As past performance is a generally reliable predictor of future success, we also suggest assessing instructional expertise and classroom management. Finally, schools may also assess candidates' school fit and ability to build relationships to ensure that candidates will thrive in their school setting.

In this document, we define each of these competencies, provide examples of indicators, and share aligned interview questions and selection activities that can be done in person or virtually. To ensure a normed process, we also recommend that selectors norm on rating by assessing sample responses and co-rating during interviews.

Cross-Cultural Agility

Criteria

- Aware of how one's own background and assumptions can influence one's perspective and interactions with others
- Strives to understand the opinions and experiences of others
- Demonstrates the ability to effectively and appropriately interact with students and others in the school community

Indicators

- Can articulate how their own background and identity play a role in forming their perception of specific situations
- Shows ability to consider others' perspectives in scenarios and past experiences
- Shows evidence of being able to contribute to a school's effectiveness by working collaboratively with others

¹ University of Washington White Paper. (2016). Managing unconscious bias: Strategies to address bias & build more diverse, inclusive organizations

² Cellini, K., Haynes, K., Maier, A. (2012). Identifying great teachers: Connecting selection, training, and classroom performance

- Effectively navigates scenarios or experiences with challenging interpersonal situations, with appropriate norms of interactions
- Speaks of students, teachers, and community with respect
- Demonstrates willingness to learn from and understand the perspectives of others

Sample Interview Questions

- How do your own identity and background influence your work as a teacher? How do you build relationships with students, families, and colleagues who have similar or different backgrounds or identities?
- How will you learn more about our school community and context?
- How do you incorporate the background, identities, and experiences of your students in your instruction? Share an example of what this has/will look like in your classroom.
- Tell me about a time when you worked with someone with a different identity and perspective than your own? What was your partnership like? What was challenging about this experience? What did you learn?

Sample Selection Activities

- Role-play: A colleague who does not share your race/ethnicity peer observes a lesson in your classroom. Following the observation, he sends you a note saying that “I don’t believe this was intentional, but your lesson included some terms that may have been hurtful to students.” How do you respond?

High Expectations

Criteria

- Assumes accountability for reaching outcomes despite obstacles
- Demonstrates the belief that students can perform at high levels
- Focuses on own capacity to impact situations rather than on external barriers
- Understands challenges within larger context
- Takes initiative to solve own problems

Indicators

- Consistently demonstrates and communicates the belief that students will perform at high levels when they have access to excellent teaching
- Consistently demonstrates and communicates their commitment to becoming an excellent—not adequate— instructor despite the difficulty involved
- Articulates high expectations for potential and performance of future students (in theory and through scenario examples)
- Holds themselves accountable for the success and growth of students
- Maintains high expectations and continues to focus on the students’ academic success when confronted with setbacks in scenario questions
- Assumes responsibility for classroom environment and culture
- Wants to teach specifically in urban/high-need schools
- Conveys reasonable understanding of potential challenges involved in teaching in high-need schools
- Provides examples of maintaining focus on the big picture and addressing obstacles in past professional or personal experiences
- Speaks specifically about setbacks in past experiences and/or scenario questions and maintains appropriate focus and optimism
- Persists in offering viable/realistic strategies to address scenarios

- Strategies focus on factors within teacher's control
- Goes beyond duties to help students achieve goals

Sample Interview Questions

- Should all students be held to the same standards as the highest-performing students?
- Should students experiencing poverty be held to the same standards as students not experiencing poverty?
- There are obviously many factors that determine whether teachers succeed in raising the achievement of their students. What portion or percentage of the weight rests directly on you as a teacher? Why?
- What does it look like for a teacher to demonstrate high expectations? What specific instructional moves would I see in your classroom? How do you create a classroom culture of high expectations?
- Why are you interested in teaching in high-need schools? What is challenging about work in these schools? How will you approach these challenges?
- Tell me about a time you went above and beyond for your students. What did you do? What was the outcome of these actions?

Sample Selection Activities

- Role-play: Let's say one of your students, Carlos, is below grade level and not doing well in your class. During parent-teacher conferences, his parents express little confidence in his academic potential. How would you address this situation? With Carlos? With his parents?
- Role-play: One of your classes has students who are below and above grade level. What would you do to ensure all students are held to high expectations?

Instructional Expertise

Criteria

- Demonstrates strong knowledge of content and pedagogy
- Displays mastery of content knowledge and instructional strategies
- Conveys ideas and information clearly
- Able to differentiate learning

Indicators

- Sets concrete, ambitious goals for student achievement
- Addresses the multiple and varied needs of students in the classroom
- Makes content meaningful to students in the district
- Confident that all students should be held to high standards
- Reflects on successes and failures
- Maintains high expectations for students when confronted with setbacks; continues to focus on students' academic success

Sample Interview Questions

- In your current role, when it comes to the instructional shifts in your content area, where do you still have room to grow in your understanding and skill? How are you addressing those?
- Tell me your personal belief about how students best learn your content area. What is a teacher's role in this process? Choose a concept from a grade level you teach or support—give an example of how your “vision” may play out with this concept.
- I'd like to know more about the curricular resources you use. Can you tell me about what you use/have used in the past? How do you know they're high-quality resources?
- How do you adapt?
- If you write your own lesson plans, what resources do you use to create them? How do you ensure they're high-quality?
- How does your classroom culture play a role in attaining your goals? Please provide a specific example.
- What are the key pieces of data you collect and track in your classroom? How do you use the data? Share two examples of times when you used data to inform instruction.
- Can you give me an example of a time when you had a student who was consistently struggling with and expressed hatred for the subject you were teaching? How did you approach the situation? If you could go back in time, would you change anything about your approach?
- What instructional strategies have you found to be most successful in dramatically increasing student achievement?
- Tell me about a specific lesson you led that you felt was really successful. What were the standard and the objective? What were the activities in the lesson? How do you know it was successful? What would you do differently if you had to teach it again?
- Tell me about a lesson that you led that didn't go so well. Why did it fail? What would you do differently if you had to teach it again?
- Describe your experience and familiarity with the Common Core State Standards (in your content area). How have you used the Common Core State Standards to guide your lesson planning, preparation, and delivery? Where do you feel that you still have gaps in content knowledge or understanding in the Common Core?
- How do you account for students who are above, below, and at grade level? What about SPED and ELL students?
- How do assessments fit into your overall approach?
- Imagine that you're teaching a lesson about <insert topic in candidate's content area>. Tell me three different ways you would assess whether your students learned the concept.
- Share an example of a time when you had to adapt lesson material or delivery to address the needs of multiple students. What data did you use to inform that decision?

Sample Selection Activities

- Role-play: Imagine you are teaching a class where a handful of students are performing at or above grade level, but the rest of your students are performing far below grade level. How would you plan your lessons so that you meet the needs of all the students in your class?
- Role-play: Imagine that you're teaching a lesson about <X>. Tell me three different ways you would assess whether your students learned the concept.
- Role-play: Let's say your principal asks you for support in improving learning in your content area and grade level—particularly by grade level. What would you suggest?
 - What if your principal agrees to implement <X from previous answer>? What would be your next steps?

Communication Skills

Criteria

- Demonstrates effective written and oral communication skills
- Displays mastery of written grammar, usage, and organization
- Speaks clearly and precisely

Indicators

- Communicates clear, logical, and organized thoughts
- Uses correct syntax, spelling, vocabulary, and grammar
- Displays command of English language
- Willing and able to communicate with special needs students and English Language Learners

Sample Interview Questions

- N/A: This competency is assessed across all oral and written interview components

Application of Feedback

Criteria

- Open to feedback and is able and willing to incorporate it to develop as a professional
- Committed to becoming an excellent teacher
- Seeks and incorporates feedback from others with humility
- Draws lessons from prior experience and applies to future endeavors

Indicators

- Consistently demonstrates and communicates commitment to becoming an excellent instructor and describes examples of professional development and learning to support that growth
- Demonstrates strong self-reflection and formative inquiry while taking ownership over and learning from failures/experiences
- Openly accepts and incorporates feedback on sample teaching
- Incorporates a variety of resources to achieve results
- Generates strategies that involve a range of resources
- Seeks out and welcomes feedback from others
- Describes examples of professional development and other learning in order to become a more effective teacher
- Reflects on previous professional experiences and how they relate to teaching

Sample Interview Questions

- Give me an example of a time when you received difficult professional feedback. How did you feel about someone criticizing you? What was your response? How did you handle the feedback?
- Think about your last performance review. What are your three biggest areas for improvement? How have you addressed these issues? If I spoke with your manager, how would they say you are doing on your progress in these areas?
- Reflect on a time when you had to acclimate to a new environment or experience. What challenges did you face? How did you overcome these challenges? What did you learn from the experience?
- How do you ensure you continue to improve as a teacher? Where do you go for resources or help? How would you like to develop as a teacher?



- Tell me about a time when you failed at something (e.g., an ineffective lesson, low mastery on an assessment). What factors contributed to that failure? What do you think was the primary cause?
 - How did you handle the failure personally and professionally? What did you learn from it? How can that experience deepen your experience next year as a teacher?

Sample Selection Activities

- Provide feedback to candidate in role-plays/scenarios and/or a demo lesson. Have the candidate redo and assess the extent to which they incorporate feedback.

School Fit

Criteria

- Demonstrates mindsets, beliefs, and skills that match the school's vision, mission, and values

Indicators

- Demonstrates interests, teaching styles, and experiences that align to the school's vision, mission, and values
- Recognizes that families and caregivers are partners in student achievement
- Interacts appropriately with supervisors, colleagues, parents, and students at all times

Sample Interview Questions

- How can I, as the school leader, best support you as a teacher?
- How often do you expect to be observed/receive feedback on your teaching?
- If I walked into your classroom and you were in the midst of a successful lesson, what would I see?
- Our school has/is (insert specific feature, like open space, block scheduling, or elongated day etc.). What's

your reaction to that? How would you adapt to this school setting?

- At my school, we have (describe the traits, assets and opportunities unique to students you serve).
 - Ask them to define more specifically what you think this will be like/involve and why you want to do it.
 - What in your previous experience has prepared you for working with this population?
 - What challenges do you expect to encounter in working with this population? How would you proactively address them?

Sample Selection Activities

- Have the candidate review the school's core values, vision, and/or mission statement and have a discussion about how this may align with or differ from their beliefs and experiences. Discuss how the values/vision/mission statement are realized in day-to-day operations at your school and give the candidate a chance to ask questions.

Classroom Culture

Criteria

- Demonstrates ability to develop a positive, culturally affirming, and supportive classroom culture
- Remains productive and focused on teaching when confronted with challenges
- Displays flexibility and willingness to adapt classroom culture building approaches to meet the needs of the school and students

Indicators

- Assumes accountability for classroom culture and ensuring all students are welcomed and supported
- Conveys reasonable understanding of potential challenges to building positive, culturally affirming classroom culture
- Demonstrates ability to deal effectively with negative student behavior
- Persists in offering viable and realistic strategies to build, rebuild, and sustain culture
- Conveys willingness to try multiple strategies or something new when things change or when confronted with challenges

Sample Interview Questions

- How do you develop classroom routines and procedures? How do you introduce them to students? How do they contribute to a positive and culturally affirming classroom culture?
- Tell me about your most difficult experience with a student and how you handled it. If you could go back in time, what would you have done differently?
- If I walked into your classroom during a successful lesson, what would I see?
- What strategies do you use to support students when they are having trouble regulating their emotions? Can you give a specific example?
- How do you know if all students feel welcomed and safe in your classroom? What do you look for? How do you support all students to feel this way?

Sample Selection Activities

- Let's say a student in your class, Maria, is being disruptive by talking to other students around her. You approach Maria and ask her to be respectful of her classmates and quiet down, to which she responds, "Who are you to tell me to be quiet?" How would you respond in that moment? What would you do that day after school? What if that doesn't work? At what point would you want to involve your school administrators?
- In your classroom you have one student, Stanley, with learning and thinking differences. In the first few weeks you notice he rarely raises his hand to contribute and hangs back from participating in culture building activities with his classmates. What would you do?

Building Relationships

Criteria

- Demonstrates the ability to build relationships with both adults and children
- Acts respectfully and collaboratively toward students, families, and staff
- Is aware of how one's own background and assumptions influence interactions
- Strives to understand the opinions and experiences of others

Indicators

- Shows ability to consider and willingness to learn from others' perspectives in scenarios and past experiences
- Shows evidence of being able to contribute to a school's effectiveness by working collaboratively with others
- Effectively navigates scenarios or experiences with challenging interpersonal situations using appropriate norms
- Speaks of students, teachers, and community with respect
- Exhibits professional conduct and tone throughout the interview
- Articulates how their own background and understanding of a situation plays a role in examples given

Sample Interview Questions

- Describe the most difficult situation with a parent that you have had to deal with. How did you approach the situation? If you could go back in time, how would you have done things differently?
- What do you believe is your role as a teacher to engage and involve parents and caregivers? What are some strategies you have used to engage the parents of students in your class? And the community?
- How would you relate to and build relationships with the students, families, and caregivers we serve? What obstacles would you foresee? How would you address them?
- Describe a time when you went above and beyond to support your colleagues.
- Describe a time when it was hard to work with someone. What made it challenging? How did you tackle the challenge? What did you learn?

Sample Selection Activities

- One of your seventh-grade students, Jeremy, has been a persistent behavior disruption in class. You've seen him take things from other students, he calls you names when you are turned to the chalkboard, etc. In several instances, you have disciplined Jeremy by giving him lunch detention and separating his desk from other students. He has not improved. Today, his mother is at school because Jeremy has told her that you have been picking on him and separating him from the rest of the class for no reason and she is very upset. How would you approach this conversation with his mother? What kind of tone are you trying to convey?
- Let's say that each day, the teacher who drops off your last class of the day arrives at least 10 minutes late, and the lost time is causing that class to fall behind the others. Once before, you have politely asked the teacher to deliver the students on time. The teacher replied that his classroom is all the way across the school. The class continues to be late. How would you approach a conversation with this teacher about getting the class to your room on time? When would you involve the principal?
- You will be co-teaching with a (X grade) and (Y content area) teacher. Your co-teacher has several years of teaching experience but has not co-taught. We will role play a conversation during one of your first meetings in which you are establishing your relationship and discussing

your roles and responsibilities. Your goal for this conversation is for you both to leave with a clear understanding of some systems and structures you will use to work together.

Critical Thinking

Criteria

- Analyzes situations thoroughly and generates effective strategies
- Identifies key issues
- Generates effective/creative strategies or responses to situations
- Develops logical responses to address challenges

Indicators

- Understands and responds directly to questions
- Organizes responses in a coherent manner
- Supports response or points with specific and relevant examples/evidence
- Stays focused
- Analyzes situations thoroughly and generates multiple effective strategies

Sample Interview Questions

- Would you say that you have succeeded at your prior jobs? If so, how? What is an example of a great contribution you have made at your previous jobs that can't be shown on a resume?
- Thinking back over your education (for recent graduates) or most recent job (for experienced teachers), what are you most proud of? How could you have gotten more out of the experience? Why are you proud of this accomplishment? How did you ensure you were successful?
- Note that critical thinking can be assessed across nearly all interview questions and activities

Teamwork and Relational Skills

Criteria

- Respectful of students and others in all situations
- Aware of how one's own background and assumptions can influence one's perspective and interactions with others
- Strives to understand the opinions and experiences of others
- Demonstrates the ability to effectively and appropriately interact with students and others in the school community

Indicators

- Exhibits professional conduct and tone throughout the interview
- Handles difficult situations appropriately
- Can articulate how their own background and understanding of a situation plays a role in situations they describe
- Shows ability to consider others' perspectives in scenarios and past experiences
- Shows evidence of being able to contribute to a school's effectiveness by working collaboratively with others
- Effectively navigates scenarios or experiences with challenging interpersonal situations, with appropriate norms of interactions
- Speaks of students, teachers, and community with respect
- Demonstrates willingness to learn from and understand the perspectives of others

Sample Interview Questions

- Reflect on a time when you had to acclimate to a new environment or experience. What challenges did you face? How did you overcome these challenges? What did you learn from the experience?
- How does your own identity and background influence your work as a teacher? How do you build relationships with students, families, and colleagues who have similar or different backgrounds or identity?
- How will you learn more about our school community and context?
- Note that teamwork and relational skills can be assessed across nearly all selection stages and interview response

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