

EFFECTIVE HIRING

for Catholic School Leadership

| Dr. Tim Uhl |

Interview Process and Questions

No one questions the importance of hiring the right Catholic school leader. Research shows the impact of effective leadership and hiring literature points to the importance of “fit” when hiring across the non- and for-profit worlds. Most Catholic schools express a desire to hire for mission in order to promote their school’s Catholic identity. The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools identify Mission and Catholic Identity as the first pillar.

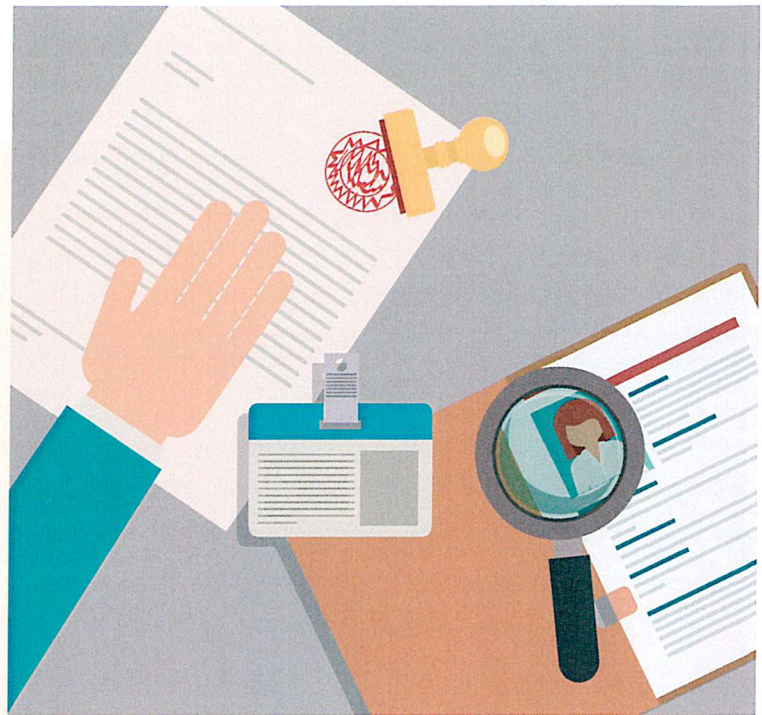
However, pastors, superintendents and advisory councils often do not know how to go about this process of hiring for mission. Questions to assess a candidate's ability to lead a Catholic school or ability to understand how to operationalize the school's mission do not exist. Thus, the hiring for mission priority is often relegated to an impractical afterthought.

When a current teacher or a parishioner is hired (based on familiarity), there is no mechanism for identifying the candidate's ability to provide mission leadership. Or, if a public school principal is hired (based on his/her demonstrated educational/managerial leadership), there is no mechanism for identifying the candidate's understanding of faith and mission leadership. In all situations, there is not a link between the interview process, the evaluation process and the formation process for Catholic school leaders. By utilizing backward design, I have identified a process and questions based on the Framework for Mission Leadership, which has grown out of the National Standards and Benchmarks. This article identifies an interview process and a menu of interview questions that can be used to identify the correct candidates, to determine areas of growth for the newly hired candidate and to market the school.

First Steps of a Hiring Process

When a position comes open, the job description should be analyzed, updated, posted online and included in the application packet. Schools need to decide how important it is for a candidate to be Catholic, and then, how Catholic the candidate should be. In the case of a parish school where the principal is the faith leader of the school community, the principal needs to be an active, practicing Catholic who can articulate and share his/her faith. But in the case of a secondary school with a president/principal model, a non-Catholic might be equally effective. Regardless, the functions and requirements of a position should be spelled out.

The next step is for the school to develop a recruiting package. This should include the history and mission of the school, a description of who the school serves, a rundown of the school's innovative programs and future opportunities, an overview of the strategic or long-term plans and the compensation and benefits program. Often schools are leery to describe their



compensation program out of fear that candidates will be turned off. Candidates are also hesitant to ask about salary, lest they be perceived as greedy. If the amount is negotiable depending on experience, however, that should be communicated instead. This guide could be used for all positions and should resemble marketing materials you might use when recruiting new families, applying for grants or writing a self-study.

Initial Screening Questions

Once applications are received, candidates should be screened via form or phone call to fully understand the candidate's background. The questions will depend on the requirements of the position:

1. Are you Catholic? Follow-up questions:
 - a. Have you received First Communion?
 - b. First Reconciliation?
 - c. Confirmation?
 - d. Any other sacraments? In many settings, the issues of divorce and marriage in the Church are relevant. This line of questioning allows for full disclosure, while also emphasizing the preference for Catholic candidates.
2. Which parish do you belong to? How are you involved in your parish?
3. What are the different liturgical seasons? How would they impact your school life?
4. What are the differences between a public and Catholic school?
5. Are you involved in any service or volunteering?
6. How do you grow your faith?

Open Book Questions

Why depend solely on a candidate's performance on a face-to-face interview? Often those interviews are filled with anxiety and in-depth thinking is not possible. Also, it is valuable to assess a candidate's ability to research and write.

After screening, and in preparation for face-to-face interviews, questions such as these can be given in advance and written responses can be brought to the face-to-face interview:

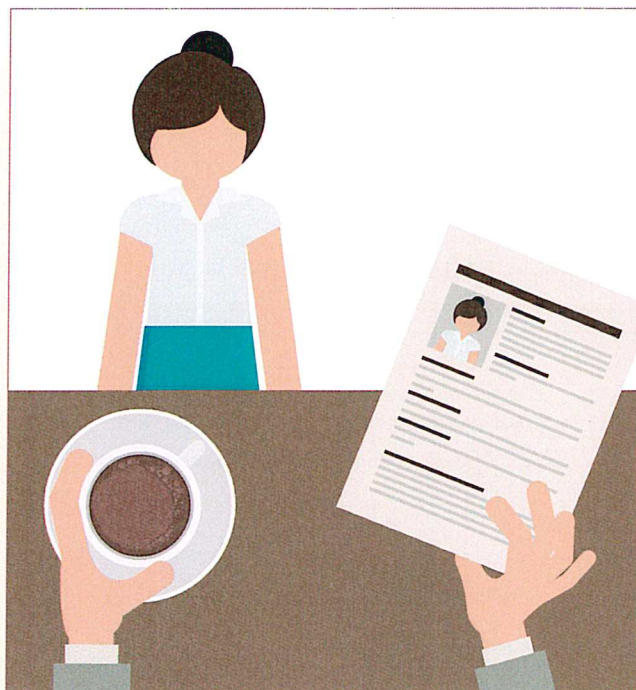
1. What is your experience with and exposure to Catholic schools?
2. Over the past 50 years, enrollment in Catholic schools has dropped. Some would argue that Catholic schools are primarily set up to educate the next generation of Catholics, but others argue that the costs are prohibitive and do not include everyone. Some people value the academic excellence, others value the extracurricular, etc. In your opinion, what should be the purpose of Catholic schools?
3. School administrators are not simply instructional leaders. They are often considered the faith leaders of their school communities. What does it mean to be the faith leader of a Catholic school?
4. What should it feel like to walk in the door of a Catholic school?

1st/2nd Interview Questions

Sometimes interviews take place with a committee. Sometimes it's only the pastor. Other times it involves multiple stakeholders and more than one interview. Regardless, it's important to ask the same questions of all candidates in order to compare the answers. References should be checked at this point—including the references they list and others you think might be important (such as former supervisors not listed). If you are interviewing a number of candidates, it might serve you better to wait. The following menu of questions can be part of the face-to-face interviews and can be divided up among interviewers:

Provided the candidate has been given a description of the school (see "First Steps" above) then ask relevant questions such as:

1. How do you think the loss of sponsorship has affected the school?
2. How has the mission of the school changed?
3. How has the loss of brothers/priests/teaching sisters impacted the school?
4. How have the demographic changes in the area impacted the school's mission?
5. Offer the candidate the seven principles of Catholic social teaching (listed below) and ask him/her to describe how those would impact his/her work:
 - I. Dignity of the Human Person
 - II. Call to Family, Community, and Participation
 - III. Rights and Responsibilities
 - IV. Preferential Option for the Poor
 - V. Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers
 - VI. Solidarity
 - VII. Care for God's Creation
6. Which values would you encourage in this school?
7. How should Lent be lived out in a school?
8. What different cultural celebrations could be integrated into the school?
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10. How do we show that we are a Catholic school?
11. Why should we implement service learning programs?
12. What are realistic expectations for service learning?
13. How often should students attend Mass? Should they be forced?
14. What is the purpose of school retreats? Should they be mandatory?
15. What do adults need to grow in their faith?



Differentiator Questions

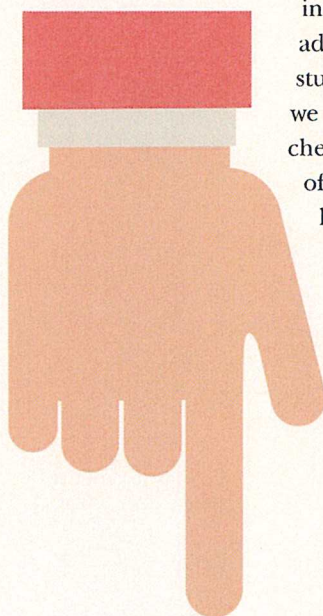
At times, the choice comes down to two candidates and you need questions designed to differentiate between the two candidates. If these questions are integrated into a job description, they could also serve as a starting point to set the foundation of formation for the newly hired candidate. These aspiration criteria could help the newly hired candidate and the supervisor(s) pinpoint areas for potential growth.

1. What is the mission of THIS school?
2. How would you operationalize the mission?
3. How do you understand this school's charism?
4. What are some of your favorite examples of Church teachings on Catholic education?
5. How do you view education as a ministry of the Church?
6. How did Vatican II impact Catholic education?
7. What does a faith community in a school look like?
8. How do you define the Catholic culture of this school?
9. What does a healthy parish-school partnership look like? Why aren't more people going to Mass?

10. How do we know if faith is growing? How do we know if our faith communities are vibrant?
11. Do we integrate Catholic and Christian values into every class?
12. How is service in public and Catholic schools different?
13. What is the role of parents in the mission of this school?
14. What is your role in relation to the advisory council/board?

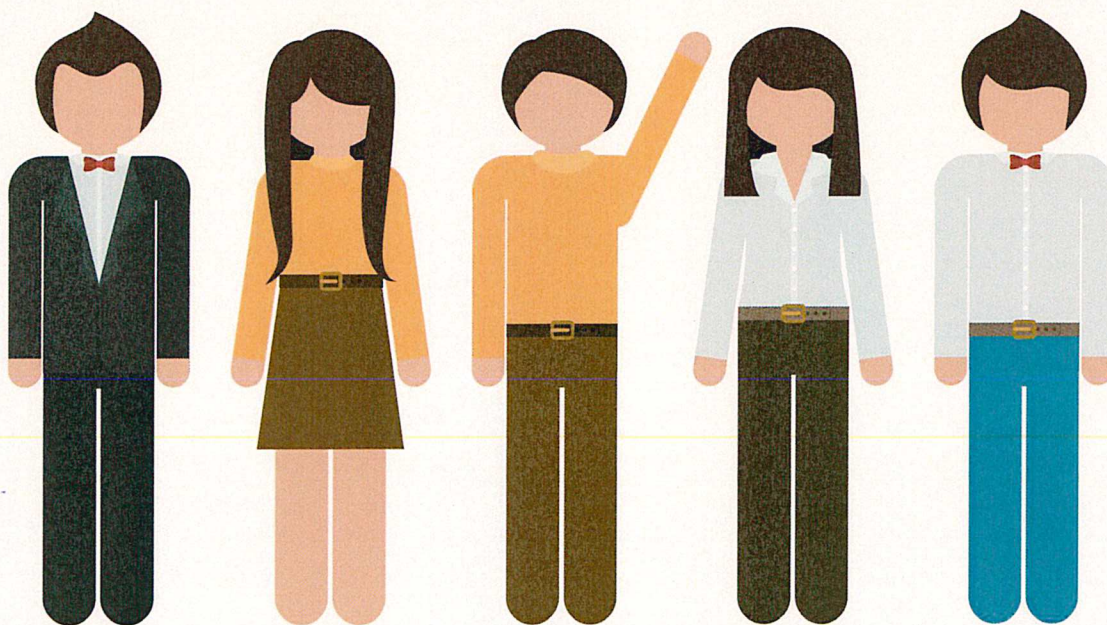
Publishing the Questions

NCEA has made these questions available in the online resource library at www.NCEA.org as a way to get resources into the hands of pastors, superintendents and advisory councils. Will that lead to candidates studying for the test and simply repeating what we want to hear? Without robust reference checks, it's possible. However, the publication of aspirational criteria for our Catholic school leaders might inspire more candidates to join our ranks and will allow our school systems to identify and evaluate the right candidates as well as assist in forming them to become even better leaders.



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