



## Reference Checking Suggestions

Last updated August 16, 2021

The hiring school's search-committee chair(s) and hiring manager (board president in the case of a head of school) are legally responsible for checking references the school feels is appropriate. We are happy to join in for reference calls as you like.

We provide a set of suggested questions below. You may wish to create your own "good" and "bad" response rubrics for each question according to the needs of your school. I have taken the liberty of highlighting a few questions I have found particularly valuable (high return-on-time).

### Suggested process:

- Advise the candidate's reference that the candidate is going through a thorough and rigorous behavioral-interviewing process.
- As a result, therefore, the candidate's reference will be used primarily to *support* the candidate if he or she is hired, to gain the wisdom of the reference's experience, and to determine fit between the school's particular needs today and the candidate's needs.
- In this way, the reference does not feel the hire/no-hire decision sits on his shoulders; he can speak freely and in as much detail as possible.

### Suggested questions:

1. **For how long and in what capacity have you known Dr. Smith? When and why did you stop working together, if relevant?**
  - a. What is the **best** thing about working with Dr. Smith? Can you give me an example?
  - b. What is Dr. Smith's greatest **challenge** or area for growth? Can you give me an example?
  - c. **If we hire Dr. Smith, what support people or support processes would be the most important to implement?** (Ask this question after trust has been established, ideally

toward the end of the meeting.)

**2. Could you please give me a representative example of:**

- a. Dr. Smith's leadership style?
- b. Dr. Smith's educational philosophy or vision?
- c. Dr. Smith's approach to change management?
- d. Dr. Smith's written communication skills?
- e. (If applicable) Dr. Smith's relationship with the board of directors?
- f. Dr. Smith's dealings with a difficult personnel decision?
- g. Dr. Smith's dealings with a difficult parent?
- h. Dr. Smith's dealings with a talented teacher?
- i. Dr. Smith's dealings with a struggling teacher?
- j. Dr. Smith's dealings with a student in crisis?
- k. Dr. Smith's experience in fundraising?
- l. Dr. Smith's experience in budgeting and difficult financial choices?
- m. Dr. Smith's making a mistake recently and how s/he dealt with it?
- n. A difficult situation that you and Dr. Smith faced together?

**3. If you were hiring Dr. Smith again, are there any accommodations you would make?**

- a. Are there any concerns you have or red flags about Dr. Smith's being the head of our school?
- b. May I reach out to you if Dr. Smith is hired to ask follow-up questions about how best to onboard him/her?
- c. Is there anything else you'd like to add? (I find that a lot of people throw something valuable in here.)