



WINNING THE JOB FROM THE INSIDE

A Brief for Internal Candidates

INTRODUCTION

Competing for a promotion inside your own organization offers advantages—relationships, context, and continuity—but it also introduces unique headwinds. Interview teams often expect internal candidates to know district challenges more deeply and to present specific, actionable solutions. External candidates, by contrast, may be viewed as “fresh” and innovative. To win from the inside, you must demonstrate both continuity and innovation: a clear record of impact in the current system and a compelling plan to move the work forward.

COMMON PITFALLS FOR INTERNAL CANDIDATES

Internal candidates sometimes underestimate the process. They assume colleagues already know their results, expect loyalty to substitute for proof, or avoid discussing difficult, well-known issues. These missteps can leave committees wanting more evidence, more candor, and more vision. Treat the process exactly as you would an external job opportunity—prepare thoroughly, highlight the impacts you’ve made in your current role, and address tough topics head-on.

BEST PRACTICES FOR APPLICATIONS AND INTERVIEWS

First, be more prepared than anyone. Submit a tailored cover letter and a results-focused résumé. You might also include a concise 90-day entry plan with milestones and metrics. In interviews, offer tactful, concrete solutions to priority challenges in the district. Professionally share your diagnosis, the stakeholders you will engage, your 30/60/90-day actions, and how you will measure success. Interview teams often appreciate your plan of action.

Show passion and professionalism. Explain why this role, in this community, at this moment aligns with your values and the district’s mission. Bring evidence of performance such as artifacts highlighting achievement, culture, or operational improvements. Some representative artifacts might include a walkthrough tool, improved student achievement data, newspaper articles or a project plan.

Tell strong stories using the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result), and anticipate “push” questions about politics, resistance, or past missteps. Make sure the interview teams know why you’re interested in the job, that you have a plan and how you will support them as a leader.

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WINNING THE JOB FROM THE INSIDE

A Brief for Internal Candidates Continued

USING “FIT” RESEARCH TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

Person–Organization Fit research (e.g., Kristof, 1996) distinguishes two forms of alignment you can leverage. Supplementary fit is the values/culture match—how your beliefs and leadership behaviors reflect district norms and aspirations. Name two or three core values the district holds and provide concrete examples of how you have lived them in decisions, investments, or classroom-facing work. Complementary fit is where you fill critical gaps—capabilities the district needs but lacks. Identify one or two areas (data use, instruction, retention, family trust, fiscal discipline) and show how your skills supply what the organization demands. Translate this FIT research into practically what the district needs now and what you bring to meet those needs.

BALANCING EXPERIENCE WITH FRESH IDEAS

Internal candidates should not rely solely on tenure or familiarity. Bring at least one new, research-informed idea for each core domain—Teaching & Learning, People/Culture, and Operations—and tailor it to local context. Frame yourself as coachable and decisive: “Here is my stance, what I still want to learn, and how I will adjust based on stakeholder input.”

If you are competing for a job with candidates that have more experience than you consider showing more passion for the job, how you can leverage (relationships you already have) and be more prepared (information about the district, handouts, entry plan, etc.) than those candidates. They key efforts might be the difference!

CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

End with clarity and confidence. Reaffirm your commitment to students and staff, summarize the three wins you will pursue in your first 90 days, and thank the committee for the opportunity. Remember: you are not simply the “known quantity”; you are the known performer with the right fit and a clear, credible plan. If the opportunity is meant to be...you'll get the job offer!

Reference: Kristof, A. L. (1996). Person–organization fit: An integrative review of its conceptualizations, measurement, and implications.

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