New Teacher Onboarding and Cultivation

This document can help school leaders design and develop their on-campus or remote new teacher onboarding process as well as new hire cultivation strategies. It includes general guidance and specific considerations if schools return to their physical buildings in the fall or continue remote learning.

Strategies for Teacher Onboarding

Introduction

Amidst uncertainty about what the coming school year will look like, leaders need flexible onboarding plans to account for both remote and in-person possibilities. School leaders should prepare to address this ambiguity while ensuring new (and returning) staff understand expectations and feel connected to their school communities. Leaders will eventually need to onboard staff to school buildings, so this guide may also help leaders think through that process, whether it happens at the start of or midway through the school year.

Implement a thorough orientation plan to ensure employees are successful, satisfied, and supported. By setting clear job expectations, providing role-specific information, and sharing knowledge about resources, your staff will feel set up for success. Staff working remotely will need clear guidance, instructions, and timelines, as well as plenty of opportunities to engage with new colleagues and leaders.

School leaders can increase new teacher performance and retention with a strong, school-specific onboarding plan. School leaders can shape their new teachers’ experiences by providing them with a thoughtful, intentional onboarding experience that sets them up for success. Even if your district conducts orientation for new hires, it’s critical that you develop additional orientation materials and activities specific to your school.

It is costly to lose a new hire in the first few days of school:
- Districts spend thousands of dollars each year to refill teacher vacancies
- It costs school leaders time to find a replacement
- It costs students instructional time with an effective teacher

1 [https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/the-cost-of-teacher-turnover](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/the-cost-of-teacher-turnover)
Onboarding goals

Leaders can use a hierarchy of needs to prioritize orientation activities and information:

Creating an onboarding plan

1. Use the guiding questions below to identify the key messages and information your onboarding plan should include. Even if schools return to their physical buildings in the fall, it will still be helpful to share what remote learning looked like (e.g., how was it implemented, what experiences did teachers, students, and families have) with new hires, so leaders will want to account for the most pertinent remote considerations as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Considerations</th>
<th>Remote Considerations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Where can teachers find what they need (e.g., materials, resources, copies)?</td>
<td>• What technology do teachers need (e.g., laptop, Wi-Fi, Zoom)? How do teachers access technology help?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Where are the important locations in the building (e.g., cafeteria, gym, office)?</td>
<td>• What platform is used for remote learning? How do teachers use and access it?</td>
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<td>• What is the school’s policy on teacher attendance?</td>
<td>• What knowledge management systems exist and how do teachers access them?</td>
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<td>• How should teachers dress on days with students? For PD?</td>
<td>• What other tools (e.g., data systems, HR) will teachers need?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What is the calendar?</td>
<td>• How do teachers communicate with colleagues, students, families, and their supervisor?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What is my class schedule?</td>
<td>• What is a typical schedule for a teacher working remotely? Is there any flexibility?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How do I know if I have English learners in my class? Where can I find their proficiency levels?</td>
<td>• How does the school meet the needs of students who do not have internet access?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How can I identify and learn more about my students with IEPs and 504s? Who are the Special Educators I will be working with, and how will we be collaborating to ensure I understand the needs of our students?</td>
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</table>
### General Considerations

- What is the vision for excellent instruction?
- What curricular materials will teachers be expected to use?
- What are the expectations for planning lessons?
- How often will teachers be observed and who will observe them?
- What are the expectations for classroom set-up and school-wide routines?
- What are the expectations for student conduct?
- What are the positive and negative consequences for student conduct?
- What are the expectations for communication with families? How will I communicate with families who do not speak English?
- What is the process if there are classroom management problems?
- What is the process for documenting student behavior issues?
- What are the expectations for planning time?
- What are the expectations for providing English language development supports and special education accommodations?

### Remote Considerations

- What is the vision for excellent remote instruction? How is remote instruction evaluated? What are remote observations like?
- What curricular materials will teachers be expected to use?
- What are the expectations for planning lessons?
- How do teachers track and manage their time while working remotely?
- What are the norms for teachers working remotely?
- What are student expectations for remote learning? How do behavioral expectations translate to remote learning?
- How are teachers expected to engage families while teaching remotely?

### Expectations

- How did the school transition to a remote setting in the spring? What is important to know about the experiences students, families, and teachers had?
- What is the school culture like? What are the norms and core values and what do they look like in practice?
- What do I need to understand about the school community, students, and families?
- Who should I talk to if I have instructional challenges? Who is the special education specialist? Who is the ELD specialist or teacher(s)? Will I have opportunities to collaborate with them?
- What does peer collaboration look like?
- Is there an opportunity to meet the people who provide support services to students?
- Will I be assigned a mentor or a coach?
- What technology do students have access to? How do school staff ensure equitable learning opportunities across all students?
- How do school core values translate to a remote environment?
- How will new staff meet and build relationships with their colleagues, including support staff and leadership team members?
- How do teachers collaborate and share resources remotely?
- What remote structures exist for building and maintaining culture among staff, families, and students? How can I support building partnerships with parents of students with IEPs in particular?

### Community

- What did remote learning look like in the spring?
- What should my students learn this year? How is this modified based on learning students may have lost as a result of school closures?
- What do they already know (diagnostic)?
- How do teachers monitor and track their students' learning remotely? How do I do this for students with IEPs or students learning English?
- How do teachers adapt curriculum to be effective in remote classrooms?
<table>
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<th>General Considerations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• How will I assess their progress (interim)?</td>
<td>• What remote instruction tools (e.g., breakout rooms, student collaboration tools) do teachers use to advance student learning?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How will I assess their mastery (summative)?</td>
<td>• How do teachers remotely differentiate to meet the needs of all students, especially diverse learners?</td>
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<td><em>E.g.</em>, <em>X % of student will demonstrate Y level of mastery on Z assessment.</em></td>
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<td>• What is the school-wide system for using data to identify and support students who are not sufficiently responding to instruction?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Professional Growth Plan</th>
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<td>• What skills do I need to strengthen this year?</td>
<td>• How do teachers continue to grow and develop in remote work environments?</td>
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<td>• What resources will I access to build those skills?</td>
<td>• What does remote professional development and coaching look like?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What support do I need to build this skill?</td>
<td>• How do teachers access instructional supports?</td>
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<td>• What are my long-term career and development opportunities?</td>
<td>• Can teachers do peer observations remotely?</td>
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<td>• How do teachers receive feedback? How often do teachers engage with their supervisor or coach?</td>
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2. With the key messages and information identified, complete the chart below to map when, how, and by whom this information will be presented to new teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Needs</th>
<th>Expectations</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Academic Goals</th>
<th>Professional Growth Plans</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What should teachers who are well-oriented to your school know? (Summarize responses to questions above)</td>
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<td>When do they need to know it?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What activities, resources and messages will you use?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How will you ensure this onboarding component is equitable and inclusive across staff (e.g., if you’re working remotely, will all staff be able to engage in live activities? How will you consider the identities of new staff?)</td>
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<td>How and when will you reinforce these messages?</td>
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3. Finally, combine onboarding events, activities, and strategies on a calendar to create an **onboarding schedule**. Note that some activities may be independently completed by new hires (e.g., read school culture playbook and identify questions to debrief in a manager check-in).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event/Activity/Strategy</th>
<th>When should it be complete?</th>
<th>Who will complete it? If not me, how will I share next steps?</th>
<th>What resources or materials are needed?</th>
<th>What is the purpose? How does this meet onboarding goals?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex: New Teacher Remote Staff Meeting</td>
<td>August 28 at 3 pm eastern</td>
<td>John Sheppard, Principal</td>
<td>Zoom line, calendar invite, staff handbook, orientation schedule, and mentor pairs</td>
<td>Set expectations, assign mentors, give out first semester formal orientation schedule</td>
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New Hire Cultivation

Why should you cultivate new hires?

• Keep the new hires engaged and build excitement to ensure that new hires begin teaching despite competition from other schools or personal challenges. This can also help you predict and plan for any potential last-minute vacancies.
• Anticipate and address new hires’ questions and concerns regarding online learning and the uncertainty around transitioning back to physical schools.
• Start setting expectations with new hires on your vision of effective teaching and other school expectations so that new hires arrive feeling informed and prepared for the first few weeks of school.
• Build new hires’ investment in school culture and philosophy to show your commitment to them from the time of hire to when the school year starts.
• Connect new hires with a strong buddy or mentor to start the year feeling supported.

When should you cultivate new hires?

You should begin to cultivate when you first interview a teacher—whether that’s January or July. Cultivation should continue at least monthly after an offer is accepted, and cultivation should end when the teacher starts at your school for orientation. Consistent, engaging candidate cultivation is especially critical amidst school closures and disruptions to daily life. Use clear, regular communication with candidates and new hires throughout to keep them up to date and informed and to model the communication you expect to see across all staff.

What should you include in cultivation messages?

School Community

• Personal message from school leader welcoming new hires and sharing more about themselves
• Spotlight on current staff members and students (e.g., “day in the life”) for new hires to learn more about teaching, learning, and the culture at your school
• News from the school community, like updates on sports, activities, family and community engagement, etc.
• Information about the school neighborhood like pictures, important history or context, links to recent news articles
• Updates on events like a welcome back picnic, remote staff coffee date, etc.

Logistics

• Upcoming key dates and action items
• Schedule for orientation and the first week of school, including typical day structure and any special training sessions
• A time to visit and set up their classroom—this should be as early as possible. Or, if the school year will start remotely, orientation to the tools used for online teaching and learning, including instructional platform, resources, knowledge management, communication structures, etc.
• Location of parking, bathrooms, lunchroom, and mailboxes
• A staff directory
• An FAQ section to anticipate questions teachers may have as well as contact information for teachers with additional questions or concerns
Sample New Hire Cultivation Strategies

Individual Emails from School Leaders
Emails are quick, easy, and can be delegated. They also create a dialogue for questions and concerns.

- Send a welcome email to new teachers once they’re hired with a personalized message expressing why you’re excited to have them on board. Share an overview of orientation/onboarding, key dates, and any optional opportunities to engage with the school community in advance of their official start date.
- School leaders should follow up with new staff occasionally to highlight specific opportunities, introduce them to their colleagues/teams, or share important action items, but it’s more efficient and easier on inboxes to send all new hires newsletters. (see section below).
- These personalized emails should be concise and require a response to maintain and create an open line of communication.

Newsletters
Newsletters are efficient ways to engage new hires in your school community and communicate key information, dates, and action items.

- Depending on the quantity of new hires, you may send a new hire-specific newsletter or add them to a general staff newsletter.
- Use pictures, videos, and messages from a variety of school stakeholders to illustrate your school community.
- Send newsletters on a regular cadence so that new hires know when to expect them.
- See a sample newsletter here.

Remote Events for New Hires
In remote settings, it’s especially important to create intentional opportunities for staff to create and build culture. In addition to more formal onboarding and professional development sessions, leaders should create informal opportunities for staff to connect on professional and more personal levels.

- Host a new teacher welcome coffee date or happy hour via Zoom video call. This could look like:
  - Having current teachers join and share more about what they enjoy about teaching at your school.
  - Inviting students and families to join and share their perspectives (share some sample prompts in advance so that they can come prepared).
  - Playing a game as an ice breaker or activity (see resources from above section)
  - Questions and answers
- Give new hires a remote tour of your school. Have current teachers, families, and/or students participate or lead, and use pictures, video, articles, interviews, artwork, quotes, etc. to paint a picture of your school community.
- Have new hires “shadow” a remote lesson with a strong teacher.
- Include new hires on all-staff updates or newsletters to give them a feel for your school culture.
- Pair new teachers with a veteran teacher who will serve as a mentor or buddy and help answer questions, share information, and provide their perspective.

Personal Outreach from Staff Members
New hires may appreciate a call or email from a returning teacher who is successful and excited about working at your school. Some schools tap one returning teacher to lead up this outreach for all new candidates, while others have returning teachers of the same content area or grade level conduct the outreach. This informal contact helps the new hire feel valued and committed to your school, and new hires can ask colleagues questions about their experiences in local housing, transportation, etc.

- Have a clear goal or message for each call.
- Telephone calls are meant to be short, inspiring, and informative.
• Calls should be no more than 10-15 minutes.
• Callers should reach out to new hires via email to confirm that the call time is convenient and to share a quick overview (purpose, length, etc.) of the call.
• If available, have calls take place via a video conference platform. Video encourages a more personal connection, which is particularly important if schools will resume in remote settings.
• Make 2-3 phone calls to each new hire over the course of the summer.
• When you delegate calls to other staff, give the caller a synopsis of the new hire’s background and the strengths you saw in the interview so they can personalize the call.