New Teacher Onboarding and Cultivation

This document can help school leaders design and develop their on-campus new teacher onboarding process and new hire cultivation strategies.

Strategies for Teacher Onboarding

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. All new hires will need clear guidance, instructions, and timelines, as well as plenty of opportunities to engage with new colleagues and leaders. Finally, ensure orientation positions new staff to build relationships with colleagues and welcomes them into your school's culture.

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 may be helpful to ask current staff to provide input on onboarding plans and share what would be helpful for new hires to know and experience as they begin their roles.

Use onboarding to build and encourage new hires' connections to the school community.

Consider how school leaders can orient their new hires to the community the school serves and how they may be able to bring school and community stakeholders into the onboarding process. School leaders should think about the specific organizations, partners, places, stakeholders in the community that teachers need to know about to better serve their students and when and how they will be introduced in onboarding.

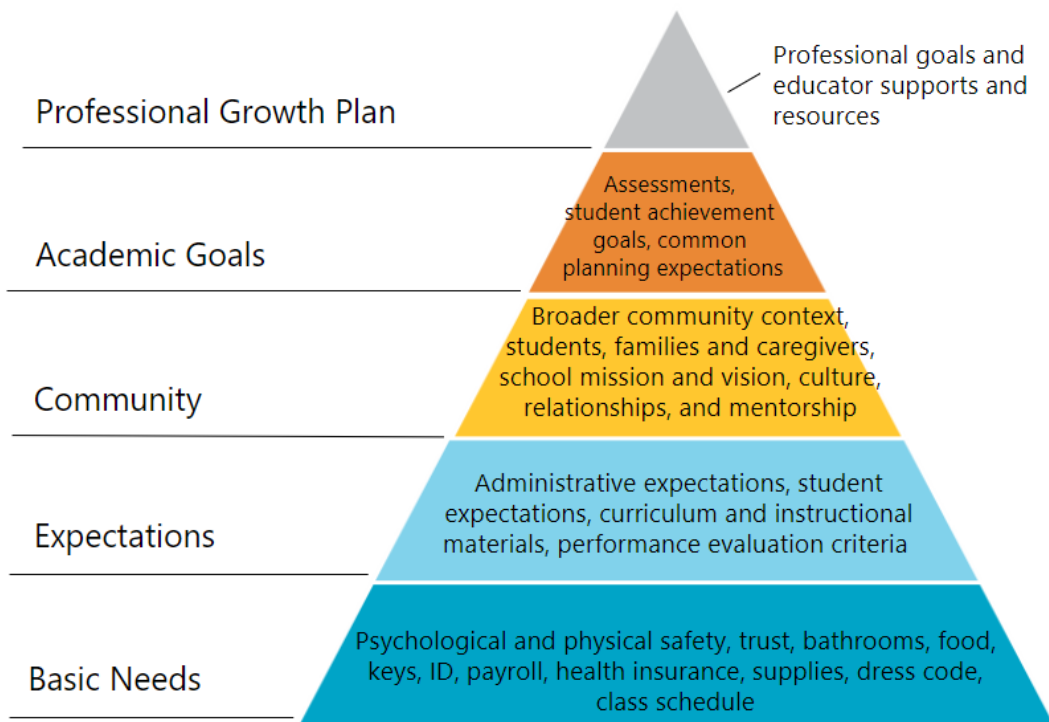### Be strategic about onboarding that happens at the system versus school level.

This resource is designed for school-level leaders and calls out the topics we believe these leaders are best-positioned to address. However, all school leaders should understand any central-level onboarding their new hires will complete and adapt their onboarding as necessary to avoid redundancies, reinforce key messages, and add school-level context to important information.

Prioritize onboarding! 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[1]

- It costs school leaders time to find a replacement

- It costs students instructional time with an effective teacher

Onboarding goals

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

Professional Growth Plan — Professional goals and educator supports and resources

Academic Goals — Assessments, student achievement goals, common planning expectations

Community — Broader community context, students, families and caregivers, school mission and vision, culture, relationships, and mentorship

Expectations — Administrative expectations, student expectations, curriculum and instructional materials, performance evaluation criteria

Basic Needs — Psychological and physical safety, trust, bathrooms, food, keys, ID, payroll, health insurance, supplies, dress code, class schedule

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

Creating an onboarding plan

1. Use the guiding questions below to identify the key messages and information your onboarding plan should include. Again, as stated at the top of the document, school leaders should familiarize themselves with all central level onboarding and adapt their onboarding content and process accordingly.

Considerations

Basic Needs	- Where do I find what I need (e.g., materials, resources, copies)? - Where are the important locations in the building (e.g., cafeteria, gym, office)? - Who and what structures help ensure teachers, staff, students, and families/caregivers feel safe and welcomed at school? How do teachers get support here, for themselves and/or students, families, and caregivers? - What is the school's policy on teacher attendance? - How should teachers dress on days with students? For PD? - What is the calendar? - What is my class schedule? - How do I know if I have multilingual learners in my class? What resources are available to help me support them? - 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? - What is the curriculum and required instructional materials? How are they accessed and how do teachers learn how to use them effectively? - What technologies and tools are used for teaching and learning? How do I use and access them? - What knowledge management systems exist and how do teachers access them? - What other tools (e.g., data systems, HR) will teachers need? - How do teachers communicate with colleagues, students, families, and their supervisor? - What is the typical teacher schedule? Is there any flexibility? - What are the important safety protocols teachers should be aware of and what are their expectations in execution?

General Considerations	
Expectations	- What is the vision for excellent instruction? - What curricular materials will teachers be expected to use? - What are the expectations for planning or preparing for lessons? - How often will I be observed and who will observe? - What the school-wide supports and systems for serving multilingual learners and students with disabilities? What role are teachers expected to play outside of providing access to scaffolded grade-level instruction? How do teachers get information about what additional supports those students are receiving to ensure coherence? - What are the expectations for classroom set-up and school-wide routines? - What are the expectations for student conduct? - What schoolwide systems support all students to meet these expectations? - What are the expectations for communication with families? How will I communicate with families whose primary languages are not English? - What is the process if there are classroom management problems? - What are the expectations for planning time?
Community	- 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 students with disabilities coordinator or lead? Who is the ELD specialist or teacher(s)? How do I collaborate with them to ensure all students have access to excellent learning? - What does peer collaboration look like? - Will I be assigned a mentor or a coach? If so, what are the expectations for that relationship? - What technology do students have access to? How will I ensure equitable learning opportunities across all students?

Academic Goals	- What should my students learn this year? - What supports are in place to understand students' needs and identities? - How do I provide the just in time supports that students need to access grade-level content? - What are the school's and system's assessment policies and systems? What diagnostic, interim, and summative assessments are used and how do I access them and prior data?

General Considerations

	- How will I assess their progress (interim)? - How will I assess their mastery (summative)? *E.g., X % of student will demonstrate Y level of mastery on Z assessment.* - How are assessment data used and responded to at the classroom, school, and district levels? - What are the multi-tiered systems of support processes and structures?
Professional Growth Plan	- What assets am I walking in with and how will I be supported to leverage these as I start my role? - What skills do I need to strengthen this year? Why are these skills prioritized? How will my progress be assessed? - What resources will I access to build those skills? - What support do I need to build this skill? - What are my long-term career and development opportunities? - What else do I need to feel professionally and personally supported?

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**.

	Basic Needs	Expectations	Community	Academic Goals	Professional Growth Plans
What should teachers who are well-oriented to your school know? (Summarize responses to questions above)					
When do they need to know it?					
What activities, resources and messages will you use?					
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?)					
How and when will you reinforce these messages?					

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). For each onboarding activity, include a clear timeline for completion, a contact person for follow up questions, links or directions to key resources or materials, and a quick overview of the purpose and alignment to overall onboarding goals. Create a user-friendly schedule to share with each teacher and be sure to track all onboarding scheduled centrally as well.

New Hire Cultivation

Why should you cultivate new hires?

- Keep new hires engaged and build excitement to ensure that they 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 starting new positions. Be sure to address concerns seriously, and balance naming challenges with communicating a sense of possibility and optimism.

- 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.

- Access to curricular materials, training materials, and planning documents.

- 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.

Virtual Events for New Hires

Virtual events are opportunities for staff to create and build culture before they officially start. In addition to more formal onboarding and professional development sessions, leaders should create informal opportunities for staff to connect on professional and 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 strong teacher by sharing a video of effective instruction and then inviting the new hire and current teacher to a debrief and discussion via video conference.

- 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.

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