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CYCLE 1

PLANNING FOR YOUR FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

In This Section

- **Setting Up the Physical Environment**
- **Routines**
- **Procedures**

Context About the Theme of Planning for Your First Day of School

There are few things more exciting to new teachers than getting the key to set up the physical environment of their classroom. The fall buzz can be felt on campus as everyone prepares for students' first week back to school. Even seasoned teachers report back from the summer eager to get back to their classrooms. When a new group of students enters their learning space for the first time, what impression do we want to make? We want teachers, especially new ones, to be intentional in leaving a positive and long-lasting one. In other words, we make choices that are deliberate, calculated, intended, purposeful, and planned. Make the most of the set-up time before students arrive by focusing their attention on the decisions they make about the physical environment, and about the routines and procedures they will put into place.

New teachers begin to make a positive first impression through thoughtful choices about the way they set up their physical classroom. Posters, plastic organizers, and colorful bins are great but they are not required nor do they guarantee an intentionally inviting classroom. We've seen too many classrooms that seem more social media-friendly than student-friendly. The space should reflect the functionality of the young people who are in it. In addition, the environment should be print-rich such that it promotes the literacies used to learn. Finally, the spaces should be organized, tidy, and orderly; one does not have to spend hundreds of dollars for students to know that you care about the space that you all share.

The routines and procedures taught by the teacher need to align with the physical and desired psychological environment. These routines and procedures should answer the question, "How do we learn and work together?" Since this is the teacher's first year, they may have trouble imagining potential and realistic scenarios on their own. Instructional leaders and coaches can support them directly by sharing their own experiences with students. They have an opportunity to explain why thinking ahead and being prepared with protocols minimizes unwanted distractions. Thus begins an important dialogue about setting a foundation for effective classroom management.

In Their Shoes

Establishing Your Classroom Environment Leader Reflection

Directions: Instructional leaders, coaches, and mentors are not only effective because they bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to their role but also because they connect with their coachees' reality and recall how they felt when they were in the same position.

Since it may have been a few years since you were a first-year teacher, let's take a step back to remember and put ourselves in their shoes.

1. Describe the physical environment of your first-year classroom.

2. Were there rookie mistakes you made in your set-up? If so, what were they and how did you correct them?

3. As a new educator, what was challenging about creating routines and procedures that worked for you and your students?

4. How did you turn your area(s) of growth into an area(s) of strength?

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5. Looking back, what coaching support did you receive? What do you wish you would have received?

6. How will you incorporate your own experience when developing your instructional coaching plan for your new teachers? How will you meet the needs of new teachers?

Coaching for Reflection

In each cycle, we will offer a scenario to practice preparing for a coaching conversation. Coaching is not about identifying what is wrong, but rather what is next. This requires asking questions that mediate the thinking of the coachee. Costa and Garmston's (2015) work on cognitive coaching focuses exactly on this approach. We have gathered questions from several sources to use in your coaching practice (see Figure 1.1). We keep a list of these questions in our notebooks so that when coaching opportunities arise, we are ready.

Figure 1.1 Coaching Questions to Support Meaningful Learning

Nine Coaching Questions to Mediate Thinking (School Reform Initiative, 2023)

1. Why do you think this is the case?
2. What do you feel is right?
3. What is your hunch about . . . ?

4. What was your intention when . . . ?
5. What surprises you about . . . ? Why are you surprised?
6. What is the best thing that could happen?
7. What are you most afraid will happen?
8. What do you need to ask to better understand?
9. What is the one thing you won't compromise?

Four Questions for Coachable Actions for Planning (Student Understanding)

1. How will you know what misconceptions your students possess?
2. How will you know what they understand?
3. What evidence will you accept for this understanding?
4. How will you use their understanding to plan future instruction?

Four Cognitive Coaching Questions for Planning (Teacher Insights) (Costa & Garmston, 2015)

1. What is a near-term goal that you have for your students or for yourself?
2. What might success look like or sound like?
3. What are some strategies that you have used before that might be successful with this group? What are your hunches?
4. What is most important for you to pay attention to in yourself?

A Question to Ask After the Lesson (Costa & Garmston, 2015)

In what ways was the lesson you *planned* different from the lesson you *taught*?

Supportive Relational Conditions (Costa & Garmston, 2015)

1. Pausing
2. Paraphrasing
3. Posing questions
4. Providing data
5. Putting ideas on the table
6. Paying attention to self and others
7. Presuming positive intention

When a Teacher Is Stuck (Paraphrasing)

You're feeling [label the emotion] because [name the content of their concern] and what you're looking for is [goal] and you're looking for a way to make that happen [pathway].

Coaching Scenario for Leaders

Principal Nissa

Directions: Read the scenario below and consider what you would do if you were in Principal Nissa’s position. Then answer the follow-up questions below.

Today is the teachers’ first day back to work from summer break. Milo is a brand new, first-year teacher. As he enters his classroom for the first time, he quickly realizes that there will be a lot of work to prepare a space that will be inviting and productive for his students. In his credential classes, he saw multiple examples of inviting classrooms, spaces for collaboration, and colorful photo-ready classes.

Principal Nissa walks to every classroom to personally welcome each teacher back. When she enters Milo’s room, she sees that he is deep in thought and looking distraught. He shares that he wants to transform his blank canvas and has been on the computer, shopping for decor, posters, and supplies. He worries that he isn’t able to buy everything he wants to create an intentionally inviting space.

Follow-Up Questions

1. If you were Principal Nissa, what recommendations would you give to Milo for creating an inviting physical space for all students? Consider the walls, screen, orientation, tables, posters, boards, and walkways.

2. Where are some resources to get classroom supplies (e.g., furniture, shelves, tables, chairs)? Consider the district warehouse, other classrooms, other teachers, and retiring teachers.

3. What recommendations or guidance would you share with Milo so he doesn't feel pressured to spend his own money to furnish his classroom?

Coaching Scenario for Leaders

Nima

Directions: Read the scenario below and consider what you would do if you were Nima's mentor or coach. Then answer the follow-up questions below.

Nima is new to the school and shares that she wants to work on two short-term goals before school starts: (1) a good physical classroom arrangement, and (2) effective routines. She is passionate about these two areas because she is committed to developing a safe learning environment with positive relationships with and among her students. Nima asks you to help her think through her next steps.

Follow-Up Questions

1. What are the top three things that new teachers need to know about routines and procedures?

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2. Nima is a new teacher so she may not anticipate the need for some routines or procedures. What scenarios will you prepare beforehand to share with her? How will they help her in being proactive, not reactive?

3. What coaching questions will you ask to facilitate Nima's thinking and next steps around classroom routines and procedures?

4. What resources or professional development might you share with Nima? What additional coaching support would you offer?

Leaders Get Clear and Anticipate

With a strong onboarding process, instructional leaders and coaches send a clear message to new teachers about best practices. They communicate and reiterate the site's expectations around student and family engagement. This minimizes ambiguity so new teachers adapt and adopt best practices more quickly than if they were to navigate this on their own.

In Our Shoes

Conveying the Culture and Climate of the School Leader Reflection

Directions: Instructional leaders, coaches, and mentors should pause first to get clear about their expectations. Then they can craft their message and provide onboarded teachers with appropriate feedback to elevate their practice.

1. Do teachers have a clear understanding of the goals of the school's culture and climate? If so, what are the agreed-upon expectations?

2. How does the organization help new teachers develop and maintain these values and practices?

3. What factors can hinder a new teacher's ability to create these experiences?

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4 How do you address and support them through their challenges?

5. What unique challenges do you anticipate new teachers will encounter?

6. What key routines are already in place schoolwide? This may include restroom procedures, movement through the building, sending students on errands, and dismissal routines.

7. Misunderstandings about the cell phone policy at the site are likely to derail new teachers and those returning to the profession. What is the cell phone policy for students at your school? What is the cell phone policy for adults at your school? How are these explained to students, families, and teachers?

Leaders Get Clear and Communicate

Now that you have a clear vision of this month’s focus and what that looks like at your site, it is important to communicate this message along with your expectations. Below you will find a sample of an onboarding checklist with a suggested timeline for three groups of deliverables: Leader/Coach, New Teacher, and Together.

Onboarding Checklist

	LEADER/COACH	NEW TEACHER	TOGETHER
Planning Week	Send a reminder email to new teachers about the upcoming monthly onboarding check-in meeting.	Complete the New Teachers Get Familiar and Implement interactions.	
	Put a note of appreciation in new teachers’ office mailboxes. A handwritten note addressed to the new teacher will light up their day!		
	Complete the Context About the Theme section, including the interactions.		
	Complete the Leaders Get Clear and Anticipate section, including the interactions.		
	Review the Cycle 1 learning guide and slide deck at the companion website and make modifications as needed.		
	Invite expert teachers to join the onboarding meeting and share their best practices with new teachers. Ask them if they would welcome new teachers to visit their classrooms and ask for their availability.		
	Facilitate the monthly onboarding check-in meeting. This meeting is short (up to 30 minutes), and might occur before school, at lunch, or after school. We have provided a slide presentation for you to use and customize. Bring water and healthy snacks as tokens of appreciation.	Schedule time to visit an expert teacher’s room. Complete the pre-work on the New Teachers Learn From Expert Teachers interactive feature.	Attend the monthly onboarding check-in meeting.

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	LEADER/COACH	NEW TEACHER	TOGETHER
	Schedule a ghost learning walk. Include expert teacher classrooms in the list of classrooms to visit.	Visit the expert teacher's classroom. Use the New Teachers Learn From Expert Teachers interactive feature to document your learning. Thank the expert teacher in person or by email for inviting you into their classroom.	Attend the ghost learning walk.
	Send a thank-you email to new teachers for attending the onboarding meeting. Confirm the dates for observation and post-observation meetings via calendar invites. Send a thank-you email to the expert teachers who attended the onboarding meeting and invite new teachers to visit their classrooms.		
	Review the New Teachers Get Familiar and Implement section, including the interactions.		
	Give them an end-of-the-month token of appreciation to congratulate them on successfully entering the school year.	Complete the Ghost Walk interaction.	
	Review responses from the Ghost Walk interactions.		
	Complete the Trust Recalibration interaction.		
	Send a reminder email about next month's onboarding meeting (date, time, location). Include calendar invites.		

Email to New Teachers on the First Day of Cycle

(Example)

Hello _____,

Welcome to the new school year—we are so thrilled to have you on our campus and are so happy that you chose to be a part of our team!

As we begin this month, I want to personally invite you to our first onboarding meeting on _____. I invited all new teachers and expert teachers to join us so we can build community and share experiences and best practices. This week, we will discuss how to effectively set up your physical classroom, routines, and procedures.

I am looking forward to supporting and getting to know you this year. It's going to be great!

Sincerely,

(Other Conversations to Consider)

- District and schoolwide committee meetings
- District and schoolwide professional development opportunities
- Local and community events
- Staff socials and events
- Student events:
 - Theater performances
 - Chorus concerts
 - Band and orchestra concerts
 - Dance competitions
 - Athletic events, games, tournaments
 - School fundraisers
 - School dances

Invitational Email to Expert Teachers

(Example)

Hello _____,

Welcome to the new school year—I hope you had a wonderful, much-needed break.

This year, we have _____ new teachers who joined our team. My goal is to work closely with them throughout the year and to support their transition through an onboarding process. For the next several weeks, I will share our site's expectations on _____ and offer resources and ongoing support in this area. I have attached a summary of this cycle's theme [attach the Context About the Theme found at the beginning of this cycle].

Our new teachers want to see best practices in action and would benefit so much from hearing about what you do, how you do it, lessons learned, and any other words of wisdom you are willing to share. Since you are an experienced and expert teacher in this area, I want to invite you to help me mentor our new staff. Would you be willing to open your classroom doors for new teachers and those new to our school to learn from you?

Our first onboarding meeting is on _____. I invited all new teachers and expert teachers to join us so we can build community and share experiences and best practices. I hope you will say yes and join us.

Thank you for shaping the next generation of educators!

Sincerely,

Leaders Express Appreciation

Here is a checklist of ways that leaders/coaches can show a token of their appreciation to new teachers for all of their hard work. This could also show your teachers how to pay it forward. Showing them graciousness will move them to show and connect with their students. We recommend that you do one item from this checklist this month to make them feel welcome and a part of the school.

(Examples)

Write a one- or two-sentence message on a thank-you card. Put it in their office mailbox with a special treat:

[School or district swag]

- Lanyards
- T-shirts or sweaters from student council or ASB
- Accessories like scarves, hats, socks, etc.
- Pencils, mugs, tumblers, etc. with the school or district logo

Expert Tip: Check if there are forgotten items from previous years in the site or district supply rooms.

[Items they may need in their classrooms]

- Tissue
- Pencils or pens
- Paper
- Wipes
- Whiteboard markers
- Smelly markers
- Composition notebooks
- Gift baskets of supplies

Expert Tip: Ask parent/family groups, community members, or local businesses for donations.

[Other gift ideas]

- Gently used novels
- Reusable shopping bags or canvas tote bags
- Boxed thank-you cards

New Teachers Get Familiar and Implement

Video Reflection

Welcome to My Classroom

Directions: After watching Video 1.1 (available at the companion website), answer each of the questions below.

1. What qualities and conditions do you believe contribute to her welcoming environment?

(Continued)

(Continued)

2. How does this teacher integrate her physical environment with routines and procedures?

3. List three ways the classroom environment is organized, orderly, and tidy.

4. What additional routines and procedures do you need to put in place to maintain an organized, orderly, and tidy environment?

New Teachers Self-Assess

A Welcoming Classroom

Directions: Take a moment to tap into your prior knowledge and assess your learning space.

1. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being least inviting and 5 being most inviting), rate how welcoming your classroom is. Explain your reasoning.

2. Think back to when you were a student. What impact did the classroom environment have on you as a learner?

3. In what ways are your classroom's physical features intentionally inclusive and accessible? Be specific.

4. Scan your room. Are there any aspects that students could identify as unintentionally exclusive (e.g., signs that say, "No students allowed")?

New Teachers Self-Assess

Routines and Procedures

Directions: Take a moment to tap into your prior knowledge and assess your areas of strength and growth in this area.

1. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being low and 5 being high), how organized are you in your personal or professional life? Explain.

2. What routines and procedures do you personally use? How do they help you to manage time and space?

3. Think back to when you were a student. What impact did having (or not having) classroom routines and procedures have on you as a learner? On the learning environment? Be specific.

Your Turn

Set Up a Welcoming Classroom

Directions: We shared common understanding and expectations around how to set up our physical environments, routines, and procedures. Answer each prompt below to reflect and determine next steps.

1. How will you set up your physical classroom so that students feel welcome and know that you care about the space they are in?

2. Reflect on the routines and procedures that are currently in place. Do you need to adjust or make modifications before students' first day?

3. Are there classroom structures that you didn't consider before? What procedures do you need to develop before students arrive?

Check-In and Follow-Up Tools for Leaders

Each of us knows the significance of a first impression. From firsthand experience, we know that it can be long lasting and not easy to change, for better or for worse. The reality is that our students, families, and even colleagues see our classrooms as an extension of who we are. It is not unreasonable to think that they make assumptions about our professional competency based on what they see. Having an intentionally inviting and welcoming space matters.

The Ghost Walk is a type of learning walk that instructional leaders and coaches, accompanied by new teachers, can use either before students' first day back or within the first month of school. Teachers open their classrooms without students present, and guests observe the physical learning environments. The entire visit takes about 30 minutes to one hour and time is set aside at the end to collectively process the evidence and wonderings.

An effective onboarding process invites new teachers to see each other's newly designed classrooms and visit expert teachers' rooms as well. This experience opens their eyes to different possibilities and gives them an opportunity to collaborate and develop their professional growth.

Classroom Notetaking Tool

Ghost Walk

	EVIDENCE	NOTES	WONDERINGS
Classroom A (New Teacher)			
Classroom B (New Teacher)			
Classroom C (New Teacher)			

	EVIDENCE	NOTES	WONDERINGS
Classroom D (Expert Teacher)			
Classroom E (Expert Teacher)			
Classroom F (Expert Teacher)			

Post-Learning Walk Debrief

Ghost Walk

	CLASSROOMS A, B, AND C	CLASSROOMS D, E, AND F
Emerging Patterns and Trends		

(Continued)

(Continued)

	CLASSROOMS A, B, AND C	CLASSROOMS D, E, AND F
What inviting features did you notice?		
What routines and procedures did you notice?		
What will you do differently as a result of this experience?		
In what ways was this process helpful or not helpful? How can I better support you?		

Source: Adapted from Fisher et al. (2019, pp. 90–94).

New Teachers Learn From Expert Teachers

<p>Physical Classroom, Routines, and Procedures</p> <p>Directions: You have an amazing opportunity to collaborate with and visit an expert teacher on your site. This tool is designed to ensure that you have a learning experience that will directly impact your practice with your students.</p>	
<p>Pre-Visit Preparation</p> <p>Before visiting the classroom, what are three questions that you want to ask the expert teacher related to the themes? Capture their responses below.</p>	
QUESTIONS	ANSWERS
<p>Look-Fors During the Visit</p> <p>What three elements are you looking for or hoping to see? Document evidence of those look-fors below.</p>	
LOOK-FORS (PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT, ROUTINES, AND PROCEDURES)	EVIDENCE

(Continued)

(Continued)

Post-Visit Reflection

Reflect on the visit to the expert teacher's classroom. Answer each question below.

1. How will this visit support your growth as a new and effective teacher?

2. What specific strategies or tools will you take back to your classroom?

3. Do you have any follow-up questions that you would like to ask the expert teacher?

Expert Tip: Send the expert teacher a thank-you email and include what you enjoyed about their classroom and how visiting them made you a better teacher!

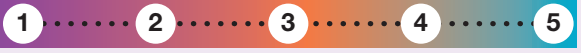

Leaders Ask "How Did We Do?"

Setting Up the Physical Environment, Routines, and Procedures

It is very important for me to gauge my effectiveness as a coach because I want to provide a welcoming work environment and make you feel appreciated—because you are! Please help me in meeting these goals.

Using the following scale, with 1 being not confident, 3 being somewhat confident, and 5 indicating very confident, how confident are you in your ability to do the following as it relates to the physical environment, and establishing routines and procedures?

Thank you for all that you do!

<p>“I know where I’m going.” I understand my current performance and how it relates to my professional growth.</p>	 <p>Please elaborate:</p>
<p>“I have the tools for the journey.” I understand that I can select from a range of strategies to move my learning forward, especially when progress is interrupted.</p>	 <p>Please elaborate:</p>
<p>“I monitor my progress.” I seek and respond to feedback from others to assess my own performance. I know that making mistakes is expected and indicates an opportunity for further learning.</p>	 <p>Please elaborate:</p>
<p>“I recognize when I’m ready for what’s next.” I make my own observations to identify when I’m ready to move on.</p>	 <p>Please elaborate:</p>
<p>“I know what to do next.” I know what to do when I don’t know what to do. I know how to research, organize information, and continue my own learning.</p>	 <p>Please elaborate:</p>
<p>What further questions and support needs do you have for me?</p>	

Tying It Together With Trust

The trustworthiness of school leaders by faculty directly impacts the achievement of their students (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Trustworthy leaders demonstrate behaviors within the five facets of trust intentionally and with consistency. These five facets of trustworthiness in leaders include (Tschannen-Moran, 2004):

- ▶ **Benevolence:** This is the most essential facet of trust and refers to a perceived sense of caring on the part of others. The leader is perceived as having their best interests at heart and believes the leader can protect them from harm.
- ▶ **Reliability:** The sense that the leader will consistently come through for them when needed.
- ▶ **Competence:** The belief that the leader has the skills to protect the core of school—teaching and learning—and manage the school effectively.
- ▶ **Honesty:** The sense that the leader’s character and integrity are truthful and consistent with their words and actions.
- ▶ **Openness:** Demonstrated through the sharing of information, control, and influence. Others are allowed to initiate and provide input about plans, goals, and resources.

Consider taking a moment to pause and reflect on your behaviors and interactions with your staff at this crucial start of the school year:

- ▶ In what ways did you develop trust specifically with new teachers?
- ▶ Were there any instances in which you unintentionally acted in a way that might have resulted in lowering their trust?
- ▶ As we move into the next month, what will you continue doing? What will you start doing? What will you stop doing?

Trust Recalibration

Looking Back to Move Forward

	EVIDENCE OF TRUSTING BEHAVIORS	EVIDENCE OF DISTRUSTING BEHAVIORS	HOW WILL I MAINTAIN OR DEVELOP TRUST NEXT MONTH?
(1) Benevolence			
(2) Reliability			
(3) Competence			
(4) Honesty			
(5) Openness			

Conclusion

Principals, instructional coaches, mentors, and expert teachers work with new teachers and those new to the site to create a welcoming classroom. In this cycle, we focused on setting up the physical classroom, routines, and procedures. It is important to have these ready before students arrive to prevent potential unwanted distractions to the learning environment. It sets a tone for positive outcomes in student learning and well-being not only for the first month but throughout the year.

Additional Resources

For Leaders and Coaches

Sweeney, D., Harris, L. S., & Steele, J. (2022). *Moves for launching a new year of student-centered coaching*. Corwin.

A 5-Minute Read for New Teachers

Pariser, S. (2018, September 6). Prep where it counts before the start of school. *Corwin Connect*. <https://corwin-connect.com/2018/09/prep-where-it-counts-before-the-start-of-school/>

An 8-Minute Read for Expert Teachers

Gonsor, S. (2022, July 29). The qualities of exceptional mentor teachers. *Edutopia*. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/qualities-exceptional-mentor-teachers/>



Visit the companion website at
<https://qrs.ly/9mesfwe>
for additional resources.