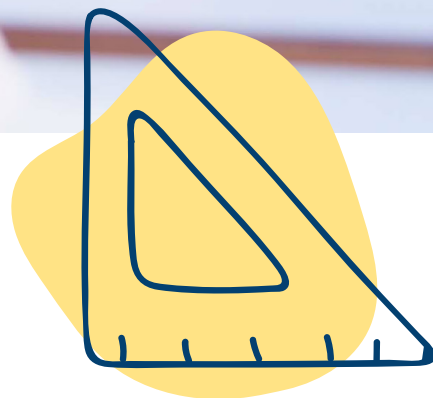




Back-to-School Blueprint:

Strategies to Set Up Stakeholders for Success in the New Academic Year and Beyond



Getting ready for a new school year is exciting, challenging, and always requires flexibility. It takes the collaboration and determination of educators at every role to make each new year successful. This blueprint is designed to help all education stakeholders—teachers, principals, and district leaders—with strategies and fresh ideas on how to make sure staff can be fully prepared to hit the ground running on day one of the school year and set students up for success.

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ROLE:

District Leader

Top Considerations:



How can I support all stakeholders to accelerate learning in a timely, effective manner?



What strategies can help us to successfully explore and adopt new programs?



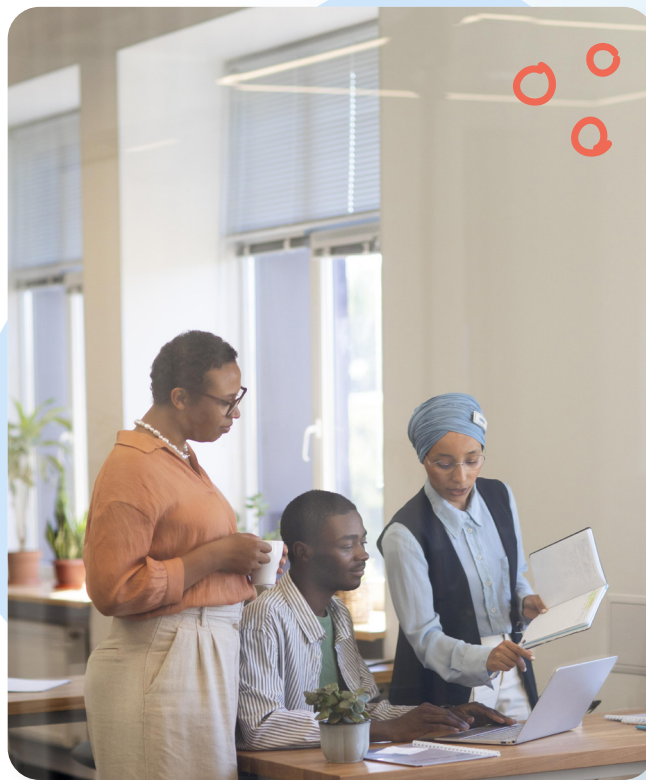
Do current teaching and learning tools save time and effort and streamline communication?



Does my staff feel heard and seen, and will my educators want to stay?



What strategies can help me recruit and retain teaching staff?



QUICK TIP



Follow examples from your peers and colleagues. Data doesn't have to come from a dashboard within your learning management system. Many site leaders garner great takeaways from examples from neighboring districts or those with similar demographics. Look for case studies or news coverage about district successes. Connect with your own staff and survey teachers to get actionable qualitative feedback.

ROLE:

District Leader

Take Action:

- 1 Leverage all funding:** Over 90% of education funding comes from state and local government budgets, so having an expert in these areas is beneficial and efficient to securing funding. You may also want to explore creative options for new funding sources, like strategic public-private partnerships to underwrite programs. Start as early as possible to avoid disruptions in teaching and learning. Lastly, keep in mind there are legal ways to blend funding streams to pay for programs. For example, a district could purchase an intervention program using Title II grants for teacher quality, if the funds are used to train teachers in evidence-based intervention strategies. You can access helpful funding guidance [here](#).
- 2 Adopt the right tools for the right job:** To accelerate learning, educators must have intervention programs that meet students where they are. Further, these tools must support efforts to increase stakeholder bandwidth and be flexible enough for students to use anywhere. Digital learning offers supplemental, personalized instruction to help students catch up and continue learning. [Here are five critical steps](#) your district can take to inform intervention decisions and implementation.
- 3 Communicate openly and early to create a positive perception:** The success of today's schools lies firmly in teachers' perception of how leadership values them. Set expectations early so faculty and staff know how and when to effectively communicate on the issues that matter. Then ensure those communication channels feel honest, open, and safe. Verletta White, Superintendent of Roanoke City Public Schools in VA once said, "Fixing that [communication] barrier between [leaders and faculty] can help lead innovative ideas forward, get teacher buy-in, and help solve real problems." If teachers feel heard and valued, then they are more likely to stay.
- 4 Look to multiple sources for data:** Many educators find that analyzing multiple sets of data often results in surprising takeaways about student growth. (e.g., assessment and usage data). You may discover a compelling story when analyzing school-level data for a learning program worth replicating across other buildings. If you haven't yet, develop a monthly data team from multiple stakeholder levels to analyze program data usage and success.
- 5 Consider how culture manifests at the top:** Every educator is responsible for student learning. However, site leaders, teachers, and other staff can't help students feel valued and supported if the team doesn't feel valued. District leaders can apply a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework for educators to ensure they have appropriate support resources and to encourage them to be mindful of work-life balance.



ROLE:

Principal or Site Leader

Top Considerations:



Does my school staff have the right tools to drive learning?



Does my staff have access to training and professional development to grow in their roles?



How can I cultivate a positive teaching, working, and learning environment?



How can I help manage behavioral issues and support students' wellbeing in the classroom?



QUICK TIP



School culture matters. [Research](#) confirms that culture at the school level has a real impact on student engagement. Creating a sense of community in school leads to more academically motivated students and helps build students' social and emotional competencies. Many principals find celebrating wins together on a weekly, monthly, and yearly basis can have a positive impact on attendance, behavioral issues and learning outcomes.

ROLE:

Principal or Site Leader

Take Action:

- 1** Look for technology that makes life easier: Classroom teachers spend hours of valuable instructional time every week on operational tasks, including analyzing data, tracking and grading assignments, searching for high-quality content, and differentiating instruction. And with each task likely comes a technological tool they must learn and understand. By adopting technology that operationalizes time-consuming tasks, and doesn't have a major learning curve, teachers have more time to invest in the human element of teaching and design meaningful learning experiences for their students. [This guide](#) outlines additional key considerations for selecting tools that prioritize ease of use for learning solutions.
- 2** **Tap into your existing experts:** Formal professional learning is critical for teachers and staff to learn new programs and pedagogies. Your team is full of mentors and coaches who can share their expertise with new or overwhelmed staff. By positioning teachers as thought partners, principals empower them to share their experience and expertise to improve teaching and learning with insight, ideas, and collaboration. Plus, as teaching staff work closely together, they become a more cohesive team, and this can have a positive downstream impact on teacher retention and morale.
- 3** **Be consistent and follow through:** An insightful EdWeek article, [Advice for Principals: Empower Your Teachers](#), suggests principals can best support teachers by being consistent. A school with consistent policies, routines, and procedures helps staff and students understand expectations and feel organized. A consistent approach also indicates that principals are being strategic and thoughtful before implementing changes. But more importantly, principals should follow through with the policies and procedures put forth. Teachers then feel supported by a leader who delivers and is consistent in his or her own actions.
- 4** **Build a creative, encouraging, stable environment:** The environment of a school, both physically and socially, influences the mindset of teachers and students. Talk to your staff to learn what elements—such as a welcoming faculty lounge, gated parking lot, or the ability to make their classrooms their own—would give them a sense of belonging and support. For students, ensuring safety and cleanliness is a priority for common areas and classrooms. Giving all stakeholders the opportunity to have a say in the school environment, and even participating in creating it, will give everyone a sense of belonging.



ROLE:

Teacher or Instructional Staff

Top Considerations:



How can I encourage students to become lifelong learners?



How can I develop a classroom community in which students learn and grow together?



Do families feel engaged and informed about their children's education?



Do my students feel safe, supported, and confident?



QUICK TIP



Proactive, consistent family engagement can be central to student outcomes. A [study](#) conducted across 71 high-poverty schools found that when teachers had active and consistent outreach to families, students' growth rate improved by 50% in reading and 40% in math.

Engagement experts suggest some simple and effective ways to connect with parents, including learning the names of family members, offering communication options in students' home languages, and encouraging parents to ask questions.

ROLE:

Teacher or Instructional Staff

Take Action:

- 1 Nurture student curiosity to maintain attendance:** Educators know students are more motivated to learn when they have access to material that sparks their natural curiosity and introduces exciting ideas. Instructors can integrate materials into lessons that relate to students' experiences and reveal real-life possibilities for future careers and exploration. By building an environment where students are naturally engaged and genuinely motivated to learn, they are much more likely to attend class and achieve success.
- 2 Leverage available technologies:** [Research](#) estimates nearly two-thirds of edtech licenses are never used. Unfortunately, much of this waste is due to lack of awareness and the learning curve of so many tools that teachers must learn. In the wake of remote learning, it's likely many districts have an influx of technology solutions that have been overlooked or forgotten after schools reopened. Teachers can ask site leaders about license availability or pilot programs. Then, work together as a team to decide which tools to use and how to get trained quickly.
- 3 Build a classroom community:** Teachers can focus on developing a strong classroom community that establishes systems and routines and defines values and goals. A classroom community also allows students to interact socially and establish meaningful connections with their classmates. When students feel that they belong to a community, they are more likely to connect personally with that community and foster positive relationships with each other and their teachers.
- 4 Communicate often and in many ways:** It's critical to establish and maintain positive connections with students and families through purposeful communication. Many teachers find it beneficial to use multiple channels to communicate with parents. In addition to weekly home packets, teachers can create a reliable cadence of phone calls, emails, and even text messages. It can also be helpful to post broader messages on social media and districtwide communication tools. For example, teachers can encourage parents to create a Facebook group.
- 5 Set academic and behavior expectations early:** Students need rules and boundaries to succeed because they serve as the framework for what is expected of them, both academically and socially. Create clear, simple, positive expectations for students and share them on day one. By doing this, teachers set the terms for success, and students see them as guardians and enforcers of those rules. It defines the teacher-student relationship as one of respect, mentorship, and discipline. The most important aspect of setting expectations is reinforcement. Keep it consistent and balance the negative with the positive. Whether students realize this or not, this type of classroom environment only enhances their learning experience and sets them up for future success.



About Discovery Education

Discovery Education is the worldwide edtech leader whose state-of-the-art digital platform supports learning wherever it takes place. Through its award-winning multimedia content, instructional supports, innovative classroom tools, and corporate partnerships, Discovery Education helps educators deliver equitable learning experiences engaging all students and supporting higher academic achievement on a global scale. Discovery Education serves approximately 4.5 million educators and 45 million students worldwide, and its resources are accessed in over 100 countries and territories. Inspired by the global media company Warner Bros. Discovery, Inc. Discovery Education partners with districts, states, and trusted organizations to empower teachers with leading edtech solutions that support the success of all learners. Explore the future of education at www.discoveryeducation.com.