


Principal magazine presents

LEADING LESSONS

USE THIS GUIDE WITH YOUR STAFF

Start off STRONG

Rethink your back-to-school
professional learning event



Many leaders start with a goal to inspire their staff at the beginning of the school year, but there is nothing more uninspiring for teachers than walking into a daylong PowerPoint-driven staff meeting the first day after summer break. Reviewing data, rules, and regulations is necessary, but it's not the highest priority as teachers come back to school.

Instead, maximize the moment to achieve school and student goals when you have the full attention of the entire staff. Plan special activities that provide motivation, engagement, and fun to start the year in a positive and uplifting manner.

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INNOVATIVE
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Take It Off Campus

Staff field trips bring people together. When teachers and administrators are in school, it is too easy to revert back to classroom preparation and daily tasks. Trips also make it easier to prove a point or inspire. Try these ideas for off-campus events for back-to-school staff development:

- ◆ **Fire Department:** A trip to the local fire department can send a message that schools are also in the business to rescue lives. Learn from the routines and sense of urgency of those who run into burning buildings.
- ◆ **Museums:** Standing under a space shuttle at the Air and Space Museum can be a great opportunity to talk about “impossible” goals teachers want to achieve.
- ◆ **Library:** Turn a trip to the local library into an opportunity to collaborate, with staff recommending their favorite summer reads and books that have been instrumental in teaching them to be better educators.
- ◆ **Ball Park:** Your local minor league stadium can remind teachers of the daily grind to follow their dreams.



REFLECTION: What venue have I always wanted to experience with my school staff? What businesses can I tap into to host an off-campus staff development day?

Plan for Success

Think through these key considerations to get started:

- ◆ **Leadership Capacity:** Use staff and other administrators, who have a wealth of ideas and ways to help, when planning back-to-school events.
- ◆ **Budget:** Careful planning can reduce costs associated with an off-campus training. Venues with little or no cost for entry are key. If contacted in advance, many businesses will work with schools on discounts, personalized tours, and tips to reduce costs. Business partnerships are also a great tool to sponsor staff activities through donations.
- ◆ **Distance:** Plan considering the school division’s policies for off-site trips and bus use. Distance from school can affect costs, especially if a charter bus is required. Take advantage of a nearby park, museum, club, or community center. Trips to big cities can inspire and energize staff, but if leaving school isn’t an option, changing meeting locations, planning unique experiences, and keeping activities moving can be just as successful.
- ◆ **Time:** Teachers don’t mind being out of their building if they are enjoying their time and if they feel it’s meaningful. Leaders should consider travel time to and from the event. The longer the day, the more care like food, water, and rest should be provided to staff. Save money by buying food and water in advance.



REFLECTION: Whom can I enlist to help me plan this staff development activity?

Motivate With These Ideas

Looking for inspiration when it comes to off-campus professional staff development? These tried-and-true staff-approved excursions can strengthen connections and improve staff culture.

Opt Outside

Lace up your hiking boots and head out to a national park—or just to your local park. Start with an icebreaker (favorite movie, a little-known fact, or a hidden talent), and then divide into groups to take advantage of the great outdoors. Kayak. Hike. Go fishing. Try whitewater rafting.

Who better than educators to combine history lessons and fun? Landmarks are everywhere, so take a staff field trip to the Gettysburg battlefield or Alcatraz Island. Road trip to Atlanta to learn at the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park, or visit Mesa Verde National Park to take in the cave dwellings.

Work Together

Two words: Escape Room. Get locked in a room with a theme like Titanic or Zombies. Teams have to solve puzzles and answer questions to find the key to escape. Does your team have what it takes?

Scavenger hunts and ropes courses are great ways to get comfortable working together in a team setting. Who doesn't love a little competition?

Learn a New Skill

Educators are creative by nature. Nurture that with unconventional excursions. One principal took his staff to learn about beekeeping. Another held a scribble bot contest.

Take a cooking class. It's a great bonding experience. Plus, you get to eat the literal fruits of your labor.

Back to Basics

Here's an oldie but a goodie: bowling. It's a fun option for people of all experience levels and physical abilities.

Support the home team. Have a minor league baseball team in your area? Get a group discount on tickets and bond over hot dogs.

Location, Location, Location: Use this space to consider what venues might work and to take into account key considerations such as leadership capacity, budget, distance, and time.

VENUE:

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

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