

PR Academy: Onboarding for Achievement and Growth

By Dr. Brian R. Miller and Brian Glickman



About the Authors: Brian R. Miller, Ed.D., has served as Superintendent at Pine-Richland School District in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, since 2013. In his 27th year in education, he is responsible for leading a district with six schools, 513 staff, approximately 4,600 students and an annual budget of approximately \$100M. Pine-Richland is recognized as a high-performing school district across all indicators receiving the Mid-Atlantic Alliance for Performance Excellence (MAAPE) Mastery Award in 2020 and the MAAPE Excellence Award in 2021.

Dr. Miller has served 10 years as a senior examiner with the Baldrige Performance Excellence national program with five years as a team lead. He has also participated on multiple site visit teams.

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Introduction

As educational leaders, we know that pursuing the mission of any school district begins with a knowledgeable, skilled and engaged workforce. Recent reports by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) continue to reinforce the challenge of teacher shortages in the commonwealth (PDE, 2022). Recruitment has also been challenging for other positions, such as paraprofessional, custodians and principals. These challenges – by position and degree – are felt differently among the 500 public school districts in Pennsylvania.

We know that an effective human resources department must address the end-to-end process that begins with workforce capability and capacity and then moves to recruitment, selection, orientation, **onboarding**, professional development, performance management, compensation, benefits and more (much more). This article will focus on an area of operations that has seen significant change over the past 10 years at Pine-Richland School District (PRSD). We now operate a **PR Academy onboarding program** for many different position types. Each PR Academy is now differentiated by workforce segment with a focus on organizational culture and job-specific competencies. We did not start at this point... and we know that we have room to grow. In this article, we will describe the evolution of the PR Academy concept and some of the successes and “learning moments” along the way.

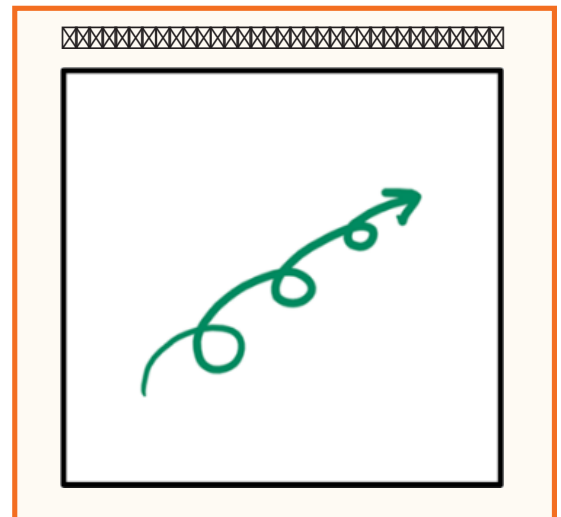
Background

For many years, the focus of onboarding was limited to teachers who required an induction program to meet requirements for Level II permanent certification. The program was limited to those teachers who had not previously completed an induction program in a different district. Participants received some exposure to district procedures and professional development practices. Without a formal set of collegial requirements, a mentor was assigned to support each inductee. The program was one year in length and participants met compliance requirements. As a district, we understood the need to expand and improve this program. We made an intentional decision to balance redesign with other strategic priorities.

In 2014, the program was redesigned with a more systematic focus. A training was held with mentors in advance of the new hire orientation day. Program elements were reviewed with master teachers. A portfolio binder was created to verify meeting topics and to collect evidence. Several meetings were held over the course of the year to review progress and provide additional professional development. The program was still focused on only those teachers who required a formal induction program for Level II certification. Newly hired teachers with experience were not included in the program. We still did not have systematic onboarding for other workforce groups. It was still a blind spot at that time.

Organizational Maturity

As we matured in our approach to strategic planning for 2016-2019 and 2019-2023, we did so with a renewed focus on workforce development and engagement. We applied the concept of continuous improvement to many of our key processes and systems (**Figure 1**). The green “continuous improvement” loops illustrate that improvement is not usually a straight line. We had also begun implementing some concepts from the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (BPEP). Per BPEP, the process acronym and evaluation factor of ADLI stands for approach, deployment, learning and integration (BPEP, 2022). Is there a



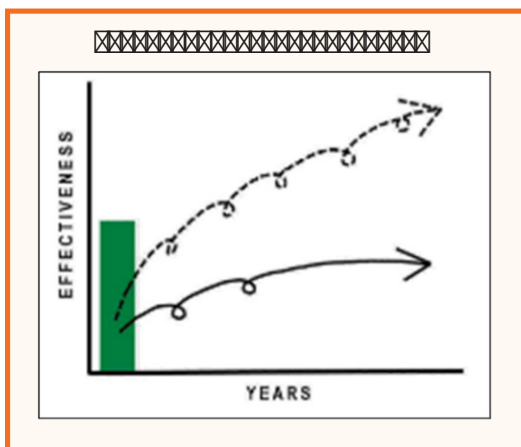
systematic (repeatable) approach? Is it deployed to relevant areas? Has it been refined through cycles of learning? Does it integrate with areas important to the organization? We used these questions to re-evaluate our onboarding program for teachers and then expand that program for other workforce groups.

First Opportunity Gap

Far beyond compliance, onboarding is also about culture and relationships. We included all teachers. We expanded the mentor training. We delivered the program through quarterly meetings facilitated at the district level organized in secondary and elementary groups. We were more focused in the identification of key concepts and competencies that served as learning goals of the program. We better understood that every organization – even in the same public education sector – has a unique culture, history and language. By expanding the onboarding program for all newly hired teachers, we began to more firmly establish areas such as: mission, vision, values, strategic plan, curriculum, instruction, assessment and more.

We also realized a significant blind spot with other workforce groups. While teachers compose the largest segment of our 520+ member workforce, we realized that we did not have a similar – but differentiated – program for paraprofessionals, custodians, secretaries and administrators (PRSD, 2022). As the PR Academy for Teachers was refined through significant cycles of learning, we also created a PR Academy for Paraprofessionals, PR Academy for Custodians and PR Academy for Administrators. These other workforce groups benefited from the past learning (i.e., deficiencies) of our other onboarding program. In this way, we were able to launch programs at a much higher level of quality. These programs were designed with input from experienced staff members in each workforce group to ensure meaningful content with practical application in the job. In a variation of our continuous improvement loops, we were focused on creating a growth mindset in all employees that started a “dotted line” trajectory of improvement over a career (Figure 2).

A person on this trajectory of taking a “step up and to the right” each year will have an even greater impact on our mission.



Second Opportunity Gap

Is it effective? How do we know? As we started to better assess the effectiveness of the PR Academy experience, we quickly realized that the results were not at the desired level. It was certainly a humbling “aha” moment. As educators, we immediately understood that the responsibility rested with the program design and facilitation. For each academy, we then implemented a significant design. For teachers, we focused the lesson plan as the heart of preparation. In a backwards design and “no mystery” approach, we clarified the 10 competencies that would be used to measure program effectiveness (Figure 3). For several years, we have now shared those competencies right at the beginning of the program to make the learning goals very clear. We also share our desire for our participants to be satisfied with his or her experience. This simple and straightforward approach helps us understand both satisfaction and learning. The same approach is used for our other workforce groups. While the competencies and meeting structure/frequency is different between groups, the overall design concept and framework is the same. We are proud to measure and report these results (Figure 4).

Competency Item	Yes	No	N/A
1. Identify the Mission, Vision, Values & General Structure/Purpose of Strategic Plan			
2. Accurately describe Model for T & L, with minimum of three circles and submodel			
3. Access PRSD Curriculum & Lesson recommendation / content			
4. Describe a minimum of 5 key elements of a lesson plan			
5. Submit a sample week lesson plan that meets minimum elements			
6. Accurately articulate the difference between a learning goal and learning activity, with at least one example			
7. Describe the three big ideas of assessment with one practical example			
8. Answer a set of questions to determine whether DOK 1, 2 or 3			
9. Access IEP-at-a-glance			
10. Accurately explain the purpose of PEP and demonstrate growth from before-to-side			
TOTAL			10 Possible %

Figure 4 - PR Academy Measures

Group	Year	Complete	Satis. (S/V/S)	Competency
Teachers	2019-20	100%	100%	98.18%
	2020-21	100%	100%	100%
	2021-22	96%	100%	98.75%
Para-professionals	2019-20	100%	87.5%	98.75%
	2020-21	100%	100%	98.33%
	2021-22	100%	100%	92.7%
Administrators	2019-20	100%	100%	97.14%
	2020-21	100%	100%	100%
	2021-22	100%	100%	100%

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Conclusion

School districts invest a significant amount of time in the recruitment and selection process for new hires. For too many reasons to list, it is clear that an effective onboarding program – as part of a comprehensive human resources system – is helpful for both the employee and the organization. It provides an opportunity to affirm the culture and values of the organization. It also helps ensure that new hires have the knowledge, skill and feedback to be successful. At Pine-Richland, our PR Academy approach has

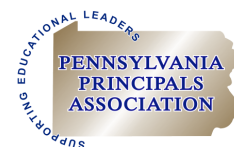
been through many cycles of refinement in the past decade. If we have learned anything, it is the need to constantly evaluate the changing needs of each position and to use the evaluation feedback of participants to keep improving. The importance of this work at either a district or building level is further highlighted by the staffing shortages experienced at present and also forecast for the future. Please contact us to discuss any of the PR Academy programs at bglickman@pinerichland.org or brmiller@pinerichland.org

References

Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (BPEP). (2022). Gaithersburg, MD: U.S. Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology. <https://www.nist.gov/baldrige/about-baldrige-excellence-framework-education>
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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CALENDAR - 2022

The PA Principals Association has developed a **Professional Development Calendar for 2022** with **new** professional learning offerings for members. **January through May 2023 will be released later.** There is no cost associated with these sessions, but registration is required to have access to the Zoom webinars. **See below for details and the link to register for the remaining session for 2022.**



This is a terrific opportunity to network and share with other principals and school leaders!

DECEMBER 12, 2022 at 4:00 PM

- ***Clockwork Part 2 (Time Management) - Presenter: Michael Snell***
 - **Speaker Bio:** Dr. Michael S. Snell serves as the Assistant Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Principals Association and recently retired from Central York School District as superintendent. He is the author of the book, *Clockwork: Time-Saving Routines and Tested Strategies for Success*.
 - **Session Description:** In the second session, Michael will present “Daily Set-Up” strategies and routines to tackle your busy days. Other topics covered will include a meeting note sheet and a filing technique to help reduce paper and files laying around your office.

To register, go to: <https://www.paprincipals.org/signature-services/professional-development-training-act-45-pil-programs/2022-2023-professional-development-calendar/>

New Principal Book Club

The PA Principals Association is offering a new, **FREE** professional development opportunity for members: **New Principal Book Club**. ***This is a great personal growth opportunity for you to network, share and be mentored.*** Sessions are for new building principals and new central office leaders; however, if you’ve become an assistant principal in the last year, please feel free to register and join us.

The first book to be discussed is ***Developing the Leader Within You 2.0*** by John C. Maxwell. Two chapters will be discussed in each Zoom webinar. Sessions will be held at **7:00 a.m.** or **4:00 p.m.** **The only cost to members is the cost of the book.** *Registration is necessary to have access to the Zoom sessions.*

For more information and to register, visit: <https://www.paprincipals.org/signature-services/professional-development-training-act-45-pil-programs/new-principal-book-club/>