

Teacher's Guide to School Selection: Find Where You'll Thrive

Your school's culture will be a huge factor in who you become as a new teacher and your ability to feel effective. These checklists will help you evaluate potential schools to find an environment where you can truly thrive.

How to Use These Checklists:

- 1. Before Interviews:** Research schools online and prepare questions based on these checklists.
- 2. During Interviews:** Ask these questions of administrators and teachers if possible.
- 3. School Visits:** If offered the opportunity to visit, observe classrooms and staff meetings with these criteria in mind.
- 4. After Offers:** Use these checklists to compare opportunities and make an informed decision.

The goal isn't to find a perfect school, but rather one that supports your growth as an educator. You deserve a place that lets you do just that, so find one of the many schools with dedicated teachers like you!

Questions to Ask Before Accepting a Position

Asking these questions shouldn't be seen as unprofessional—it shows you care about doing your job well. Schools may not be able to answer all questions, and that's okay. Try to get as many answers as you can before accepting a position.

- ☐ What support is offered to new teachers? What does that look like exactly?
- ☐ What curriculum will I follow? How much autonomy is there in what I teach and when?
- ☐ (Especially for online curricula) What training is available to understand the curriculum and help students at different levels?
- ☐ How many assessments are given across the year? What time and support are offered to use the data from these assessments?
- ☐ How are standardized assessment scores used in evaluating teachers' performance?
- ☐ How many duties do teachers have?
- ☐ How much protected individual planning time do teachers receive?
- ☐ How do teachers access needed supplies?
- ☐ Do I need to submit lesson plans and, if so, what feedback will I receive?
- ☐ Am I expected to be on professional committees?
- ☐ What is the range of student numbers in a class?
- ☐ What professional development opportunities are there?
- ☐ What meetings happen regularly, and what is the purpose of those meetings? (Are they about instruction and students?)
- ☐ What are the specific expectations for my role?

The more of these questions a school can answer thoughtfully and with awareness of what new teachers need, the better positioned you'll be for success. If several areas seem concerning, you may need to adjust your expectations of what you can accomplish as a new teacher in that environment.

⋮ School Culture to Look For

A healthy school environment will have many of these characteristics:

- ☐ Teachers have some autonomy in their instruction and practices.
- ☐ Test scores and standards are not the primary focus, and teachers are not penalized for low scores.
- ☐ Teachers have access to essential resources to do their job.
- ☐ If teachers try something new and make a mistake, they are helped and encouraged, not shamed or punished.
- ☐ Teachers feel psychologically safe and supported.
- ☐ Meetings focus on instruction and students.
- ☐ Clear expectations exist for teachers' and others' school roles.
- ☐ Clear, written policies exist for students and parents, and the administration helps hold them accountable.
- ☐ Professional relationships exist across levels (admin and teachers, grade levels, support staff).
- ☐ There is a healthy number of teachers with experience.
- ☐ Turnover is low (teachers and administrators).
- ☐ New initiatives and curricula are rolled out gradually so teachers know how to use them.
- ☐ If teachers struggle to deal with a behavior issue, they have a clear avenue of whom to turn to for help.
- ☐ The school's issues and challenges are not blamed on the pandemic.

The more of these criteria your potential school meets, the better positioned you'll be for a successful start to your teaching career.

Growth at a Glance: New Teacher Checklist

Chapter 1 • How do I thrive, not just survive?

- ☐ I protect my sleep.
- ☐ I have someone to go to in my building for support, and they like teaching and students.
- ☐ I regularly take note of what's working.
- ☐ I celebrate successes (including small wins) with someone.
- ☐ I set boundaries that work for me.
- ☐ I protect ten hours a week of additional work time so I can do my job well.
- ☐ I use kind self-talk.
- ☐ I prioritize my well-being so I can help others.
- ☐ I create routines and avoid making unnecessary decisions.
- ☐ Occasionally, I leave right at contract hours and nap, go for a run, play with my dog, or do whatever feeds me.

• Growth at a Glance: • New Teacher Checklist •

Chapter 2 • How do I get to a well-managed classroom without a lot of management?

- ☐ I feel comfortable greeting my students and helping them learn where to go, what to do, and how to do it, for every part of my class.
- ☐ I know every student's name, and they know everyone else's.
- ☐ I welcome students with a short community-building routine every day.
- ☐ I have students who know the rules and, on a good day, feel responsibility for creating a respectful classroom community.
- ☐ I see students following directions and procedures without reminders.
- ☐ I feel calm and in control when helping students who struggle to follow routines and directions.
- ☐ I don't need to raise my voice or repeat myself to get students to follow procedures.
- ☐ I feel comfortable using terms like *504* and *IEP* and have ways to help students who have them.
- ☐ I organized my classroom so the space works for everyone—it's decluttered, welcoming, and shows what I value: students!
- ☐ I make small updates to my classroom setup based on feedback from my students.
- ☐ I am kind to myself as I do this challenging work.

• Growth at a Glance: • New Teacher Checklist •

Chapter 3 • How do I keep things running smoothly and address student behaviors as they arise?

- ☐ I speak calmly and steadily when students have outbursts or behave poorly.
- ☐ I show students, especially those who struggle with expectations, that I am on their side.
- ☐ I don't engage in power struggles.
- ☐ I hold students accountable by having them solve problems they create and having them repair harm.
- ☐ I am aware of how my identity and background might cause biases, and I work to correct those potential blinders and misconceptions.
- ☐ I address disrespect from student to student and show that it is not tolerated.
- ☐ I delegate appropriate tasks to students and involve them in the shared responsibility of our class.
- ☐ I am kind to myself as I do this challenging work.

Growth at a Glance: New Teacher Checklist

Chapter 4 • How do I build respectful relationships with and among students?

- ☐ I know details about every student unrelated to their academic performance.
- ☐ I plan for time to connect with students and have them connect, just like I would for any learning activity.
- ☐ I try to accept and value students just as they are. I'm not waiting for them to feel cared for until they change behaviors or anything else.
- ☐ I work to have students act respectfully toward me, but even more so toward one another.
- ☐ I am aware of how my identity might present barriers (even unconscious ones) in understanding students who don't share my same background, gender, race, or other factors.
- ☐ I am confident that my students don't just hear me say I care about them—they know and feel it.
- ☐ I am kind to myself (and students) as we work on this together.

• Growth at a Glance: • New Teacher Checklist •

Chapter 5 • How can I work well with families, administrators, and colleagues?

- ☐ I have reached out to every student's caregivers with something positive I've noticed about their child.
- ☐ I trust that all of my students' families care deeply about their child's success at school, no matter what level of involvement I can observe.
- ☐ I share regular updates with families about what their child is learning and other essential information.
- ☐ I have a templated response for handling parent concerns that keeps my response from being defensive, acknowledges their problem, and briefly states what each party (student, caregiver, and teacher) can do to help the situation.
- ☐ I go to administrators with concerns or struggles (if I have them) instead of complaining to others.
- ☐ I have set aside time to meet with my para (if I have one) to discuss the plan and how we can help one another.
- ☐ I have at least one teacher friend in my building who knows my birthday and how I drink my coffee. They like students and teaching (most days).
- ☐ I am kind to myself as I take on this challenging work.

• Growth at a Glance: • New Teacher Checklist •

Chapter 6 • How do I increase student independence?

- ☐ I see students solving problems on their own more.
- ☐ I have more energy at the end of the day.
- ☐ I feel less guilt about not “rescuing” students.
- ☐ I track students’ stamina, and it is going up, bit by bit.
- ☐ The whole class is able to work on their own for at least the number of minutes equal to their age in years at a stretch (e.g., five-year-olds can work for five minutes straight).
- ☐ I sense students’ confidence growing through competence, not just praise.
- ☐ I offer students support when appropriate, and I support students equally across the class.
- ☐ I am kind to myself and my students as we take on this challenging work.

• Growth at a Glance: • New Teacher Checklist •

Chapter 7 • How do I teach when they're all at different levels? (and every class has students at different levels)

- ☐ I am in the habit of looking at my curriculum and summing up, in my own words, the one thing I'm going to teach students that day. I base this on what I know will meet most students' needs.
- ☐ I always model, step-by-step, what students will do themselves. I explain what I'm doing and how.
- ☐ I try to keep my whole-class instruction short and sweet. I time myself to see if the number of minutes is about the same as my students' age (number of years).
- ☐ I feel comfortable pulling a small group and helping them with a specific need.
- ☐ I pay attention to whether students get my lesson. If they don't, I switch gears.
- ☐ I provide ways for my multilingual students to engage with and feel part of every lesson.
- ☐ I welcome back absent students. I have ways to help them feel in the mix.
- ☐ I see a diverse group of learners with varied needs as a good thing and as what makes my class special.
- ☐ I am kind to myself as I take on this challenging work.

• Growth at a Glance: • New Teacher Checklist •

Chapter 8 • How do I plan effectively and efficiently?

- ☐ I know what I'm teaching before I go into class.
- ☐ I have a system for planning that I use consistently.
- ☐ I have a template for planning (unit and daily lessons) that I use consistently.
- ☐ I spend less time combing through materials available online.
- ☐ I end units on time. I let it go if students didn't get everything just right; we move on.
- ☐ I don't stay up all night planning before an observation.
- ☐ I can reasonably predict whether or not my plan will go according to plan.
- ☐ I usually get to all of my planned lesson within the planned time by eliminating time sucks.
- ☐ I am kind to myself as I take on this challenging work.

• Growth at a Glance: • New Teacher Checklist •

Chapter 9 • How do I get students talking and working together?

- ☐ I feel comfortable calling on any student, and they are comfortable responding or passing until I come back to them.
- ☐ Shyer students participate more.
- ☐ I help students listen well in addition to speaking well.
- ☐ I have ways to intentionally pair or group students.
- ☐ I assign pair or group work in a way that lets all group members contribute.
- ☐ I include group talk and work (including pairs) as a regular part of my classroom structure.
- ☐ I am kind to myself and my students as we take on this important work.

• Growth at a Glance: • New Teacher Checklist •

Chapter 10 • How do I manage assessment?

- ☐ I check student knowledge and learning before I start a unit and frequently throughout the unit.
- ☐ I use what I glean from these checks to tweak my lesson plans, add support as needed, and make assessment changes.
- ☐ I know what the final assessments are by the start of the unit. Students do, too.
- ☐ I assign meaningful work to students. I don't grade or give feedback on all of it.
- ☐ I have ways to reduce the time I spend grading final projects and papers.
- ☐ I get work back to students sooner, which matters.
- ☐ I talk to my students about ways to feel ready and calm for standardized assessments. They have practical moves and know how to take the test.
- ☐ I see the data I get back as (more) valuable. I use the parts that help me help kids.
- ☐ I put less energy into grading and more into figuring out what students know and need to know, planning accordingly, offering support, and staying connected to students.
- ☐ I am kind to myself and my students as we take on this important work.