

Making Our People the Priority: Year-long New Staff Academy for all new staff and emphasis on Staff Care

Washington Local Schools: Making Our People the Priority

Washington Local Schools (WLS) in Toledo, Ohio, prides itself in hiring the best people to take care of students and providing supportive environments for employees to thrive. The district has worked hard and intentionally focused efforts on their human capital management system to reach the place they are today.

“There is nothing we can’t accomplish if we hire and develop the right people. Just like our students, the first step is belonging. Once we’ve created a place where they belong, we can move mountains.”

– Dr. Kadee Anstadt, Superintendent

Several years ago, retention and recruitment data suggested that something had to change for the district to consistently have the talent to deliver on its vision for all students. In SY 2019-20, retention for first year employees ranged from 72-75% for certified and classified staff. For a district of 11 buildings and 970 total staff, this turnover led the WLS leaders to double down on their staff care efforts. Additionally, with news that K-12 Education was leading the nation for employee burnout across all industries (Gallup, 2022), amplifying employee well-being was a top priority moving forward.

As a result, the district launched its **New Staff Academy** – a year-long experience for all new staff, including both certified and classified/support staff positions. This new onboarding approach complements other key strategies at WLS to grow and retain staff within their human capital system – including district mentorship, premium health benefits, and staff wellness incentives.

“Teachers building relationships is imperative to student success and as a district we realize that this is equally as important for our employees. The New Staff Academy has helped address employee burnout, confusion, and communication breakdown while encouraging job satisfaction along with happier, healthier and more productive employees.”

– Lori Berryman, Director of Human Resources

New Staff Academy & The Importance of Quality Onboarding

Winning the hearts and minds of new employees is critical to both their immediate and long-term success in your district. Research also suggests that strong onboarding programs [can increase employee retention by 80%](#). With this in mind, WLS leaders developed their New Staff Academy with the goals of building relationships, providing support, and encouraging positive school culture and climate.






An essential design principle of the New Staff Academy is to target ALL new staff across the district, regardless of their role. This includes non-instructional staff, which often is an overlooked group for district-wide onboarding efforts in education. In its first year, the WLS New Staff Academy included 64 participants representing various roles, including teachers, custodial services, and administrators.

The purposeful planning of Lori Berryman, Director of Human Resources, and Dr. Katie Peters, Director of Communications, resulted in a schedule that convened new staff cohorts every month. Much intentionality was given in the selection of topic areas for learning, as well as the integration of current leaders for new staff to connect with and learn from.

The 2021-22 **New Staff Academy** schedule included:


<p>PURPOSEFUL PLANNING</p>  <p>WASHINGTON LOCAL SCHOOLS</p>	<p>■ SEPTEMBER: Protect your energy Wellness Coordinator</p>
	<p>■ OCTOBER: Manage Stress Insurance Coordinator</p>
	<p>■ NOVEMBER: Work Environments Payroll Questions</p>
	<p>■ DECEMBER: Time to Rest! Superintendent</p>
	<p>■ FEBRUARY: Seasonal Affect Social Worker</p>
	<p>■ MARCH: Avoid Burnout Assistant Superintendent</p>
	<p>■ APRIL: Get Involved! Activities Coordinator</p>
	<p>■ MAY: LET'S CELEBRATE!</p>

In the end, the results were clear – effective onboarding efforts made a significant impact on future retention and recruitment efforts. Impact data from Year 1, the 2021-22 **New Staff Academy** included:

 <p>Recruitment 2022 - 2023</p> <p>45 open contracted teaching positions 45 teaching positions filled</p> <p>100%</p> 	<p>HR IMPACT</p> <p><u>Retention of First Year Employees</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2021 - 2022 - Teaching - 97% • 2020 - 2021 - Teaching - 100% • 2019 - 2020 - Teaching - 75% • 2021 - 2022 - Support - 91.3% • 2020 - 2021 - Support - 75% • 2019 - 2020 - Support - 72% 	 <p>Reassurance Interviewees frequently asked, "What supports are in place for new employees?"</p> 
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Here is a sample of the feedback from **New Staff Academy** participants:

IN THEIR WORDS:



"This is my fifth school. This is one of the first times that I feel like a school has properly welcomed and helped its newest members."

"It gave me an opportunity to meet others within the district and learn from them."

"It was nice to feel other people in the same place as you are whether it's frustration or fear or just being in a group of positive attitudes that can be hard to find at school sometimes."

"Energy. Energy. Energy. You gave me that."

"It was nice not to feel alone."

"I have realized through these meetings I do touch kids' lives, even though I'm just a safety aide."

"Thank you for taking time to show us how to be better, and in turn help our kids."

Emphasis on Staff Care at Washington Local School

New Staff Academy is one strategy among other key strategies at WLS to grow and retain staff within their comprehensive human capital management system. Purposeful integration of staff wellbeing efforts is integrated throughout the academy. Examples of other WLS human capital priority areas with intentional emphasis on staff care include:

District Mentorship: New employees are provided with a mentor or advisor through the first year of employment.

Premium Health Benefits: Excellent health, prescription, dental, and vision insurance insurance plans are provided at an affordable cost.

Employee Wellness Incentives: Gift cards and prizes are awarded to employees who meet wellness challenges throughout the year .

“When district leaders prioritize employee engagement and inclusion, everybody wins. The district wins, keeping quality employees. Employees win, feeling professionally valued. But most importantly, when districts reserve intentional time to make their staff feel heard and respected, KIDS win. Happy adults lead to happy school environments - and every child deserves that experience.”

– Dr. Katie Peters, Director of Communications