

# New Leader Entry Plan

---

This is the plan I followed in the months leading up to the start of the 2017-18 school year, as well as my first few months after school started, in my new position as principal at St. Joseph School.

## Goals and Priorities:

- Build relationships & trust among stakeholders – faculty & staff, parents, students
- Learn as much as possible and change as little as possible
- Share my vision of Catholic education with all stakeholders

## 1. Building Relationships & Trust

The most important task at hand, which will lay the groundwork for anything else I attempt to do is to build relationships and trust among the different stakeholders in the school.

First, teachers and staff need to know who I am as a person and educator because it's difficult to trust someone you don't know. I took the first two PD days in August doing ice-breakers, get-to-know-you activities, and team-building exercises. I also asked faculty and staff to fill out a survey about their personal information, strengths, desires for how I can help them, and asking them what they can do to assist me. Additionally, in the first few months of school I spent a lot of times in classrooms on a friendly, informal basis.

Second, I spent the first half-hour of our back-to-school night introducing myself to parents – my “life story” both personally and in education. I also invited parents to come into my office to introduce themselves or share any concerns. I made sure to make my weekly newsletters very personal and “human,” so they got to know me more and more as time went on.

Third, I wanted students to know I was there for them, to support them and to help them. In addition to spending lots of times in classrooms, I also spent lots of time in the hallways, in the lunchroom, and at athletic and extracurricular events. I attended the “Maverick Marathon” (a school fundraiser) all day, which I learned was something the previous principals did not do.

Relationships and trust are difficult to “measure” because they are so qualitative. I simply measured how I did with this goal with the quality of vibes I felt from the people I interacted with. I've been warmly welcomed and hailed consistently by these different stakeholder groups.

## 2. Learn a Lot, and Change Little

My rallying cry and public platform has been to change as little as possible in the first year at St. Joseph. I communicated to teachers and parents that St. Joseph is already an outstanding school, and my goal for the first year is to learn as much as I could to understand why. I told the parable of the fencepost in a field – it is unwise to remove it unless you know why someone put it there in the first place.

This tack has helped me build trust because it shows people I value their traditions and competencies. It has also alleviated the pressure of trying to accommodate everyone with an agenda, as people look at regime changes as opportunities to advance their own causes. I can now look to next year with a strong understanding of what should stay the same and what should be changed, and changes are more likely to be accepted because I've built trust in the meantime.

This has been measured by how many changes have been made, which have been very few. It's also been measured by my own journaling, as I've been recording what I've been learning along the way.

### **3. Share my Vision**

While I am committed to making no changes in the first year, I also made a point to be open about my vision for Catholic education, specifically at this school. I included my vision for St. Joseph School in my materials during the interview process, I shared my vision with teachers in the PD sessions in August, and I shared this vision with parents at Back to School Night. I don't want people to be shocked if and when I make changes, so they needed to know up front and continually as time goes on who I am and what I believe.

I can measure my success in the tangible writings I've put out to the community – my weekly newsletter, the presentations I've given to staff and families, and meeting agendas.

### **Conclusions**

This entry plan, written in retrospect but in place mentally since I began, has made for a smooth transition and a foundation for the future. I've earned the trust of stakeholders by building relationships and honoring the current culture, and I've set the stage for any changes by continually sharing my vision along the way.