

# New School?

## 9 Questions

### You Should Ask

BY MAIA HEYCK-MERLIN

Congratulations! You have just been hired. Undoubtedly you're wondering about curriculum, facilities, and colleagues in eager anticipation of starting in a new environment. But there are some other questions you may want to ask—key questions about how your future school will help or hinder your productivity.

In my experience training both newbies and veterans, I learned that many teachers find out answers to these questions too late. They end up overwhelmed, crunched for time, and unable to get ahead. So, do yourself a favor and find out the answers *before* you start work.

An easy way to get information is to say, "I'm really eager to be a great teacher and focus completely on my students. This requires me to be very productive with my non-teaching time. If you don't mind answering a few questions about *how* your teachers get their work done, I'd be most grateful."

If you feel uncomfortable asking an administrator, you can sleuth around in other ways—like asking another teacher in the building, examining materials in the teacher lounge/workroom, or carefully reviewing the school's website.

#### Communication

- 1. Deadlines.** How do you or other leaders communicate with teachers about expectations and deadlines, say for report cards, parent nights and other important issues? Is there a weekly email or paper memo for teachers? Could I see a copy?
- 2. Calendars.** Is there a district or school-wide calendar that is published in advance of the year? How much flexibility is there to add events?
- 3. Families.** How do your teachers primarily communicate with families? What are your

expectations for regular newsletters or other forms of contact? Do parents tend to prefer phone, email, or texts?

#### Preparation

- 4. Planning Time and Prep Periods.** Do we have common department or grade-level planning time? How much of our prep time is used for meetings?
- 5. Stationary or Mobile.** What percentage of your teachers have their own classrooms? How do mobile teachers move their supplies from class to class?
- 6. Teaching Supplies.** What does storage space look like in most classrooms? Do I have access to a file cabinet? Cupboards and cabinets?

#### Tools

- 7. Productivity.** What productivity platform does your school/district use—Google, Outlook, or something else? Are you a Mac or PC environment? Will I have full access to all features from home?
- 8. Access.** I use electronic storage, like Evernote® and Google Drive, for all of my professional development materials. Can I access these apps from within the school?
- 9. Technology.** Does the school provide computers and printers for teachers? Are there SMART® boards and clickers available? Does the school have laptop access for students?

Some of these questions may seem trivial, but many great teachers become frustrated or waste a great deal of time when they can't access a beloved technology or they realize there isn't a clear calendar of school-wide events created in advance of the year. So ask questions! A prepared teacher is a happy teacher! 🍎

The webinar *Maximize Your Prep Time!* will be presented by *Maia Heyck-Merlin* on August 14, 2013. Register at [www.kdp.org/communities/webinars.php](http://www.kdp.org/communities/webinars.php)



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