

GUIDE

# THE FIRST 30 DAYS

## A School Leader's Checklist for a Strong Start

Four-week guide to help you launch the year  
with clarity, connection, and confidence.

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**alpaca**



# PLAN. CONNECT. LEAD. REPEAT.

The first month of school sets the tone for the entire year. This checklist helps principals stay focused, visible, and intentional during those critical early weeks—without feeling overwhelmed.

By breaking the work into four clear, actionable weeks, it ensures you're supporting operations, instruction, relationships, and reflection in a balanced way.

Whether you're a new or seasoned leader, this tool keeps the most important priorities front and center—so your staff feel **supported**, your students feel **seen**, and your school gets off to a **confident, connected start**.

## Pro Tip for Leaders

Use this checklist as a flexible guide—not a rigid to-do list. Every school is different, so adapt each week's focus to fit your team's needs and pace.

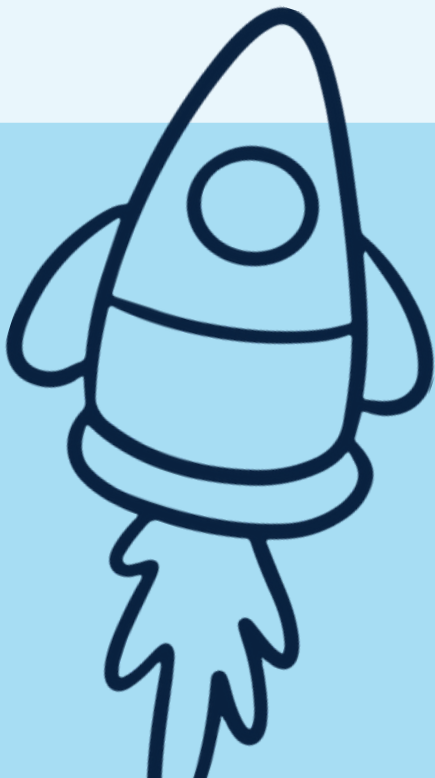
**The goal is progress, not perfection**—stay visible, stay curious, and celebrate the little wins along the way.



WEEK ONE

# Setting the Foundation

Operational readiness and  
relationship building



**Why it matters:** A smooth launch creates the foundation for trust, safety, and positive culture across your school.

# **Ensure Operational Readiness**

## **Campus Safety Walkthroughs**

- Walk the building with staff to verify emergency procedures, exits, and safety expectations
- Ensure all staff review safety protocols with students on Day 1 to set clear expectations

## **Custodial & Maintenance Readiness**

- Connect with custodial and maintenance teams to confirm shared expectations for cleanliness and room readiness

## **Master Schedule Check**

- Review bell schedules, duties, lunch, dismissal
- Ensure IEPs & accommodations are properly shared

## **Technology & Curriculum**

- Confirm student and teacher devices are working, and troubleshoot any issues early
- Ensure teachers have access to curriculum guides, textbooks, and essential supplies

# Build Relationships & Visibility

## Daily Presence

- Be highly visible during arrival, transitions, and dismissal to connect with students, staff, and families.
- Visit classrooms daily, even briefly, to show support and presence.

## 1:1 Staff Check-ins

- Meet briefly with each staff member in the first two weeks to build trust and learn how they're feeling.
- Use simple prompts like "What's going well?" or "What support would help most?" Keep it casual, take notes, and follow up when needed.

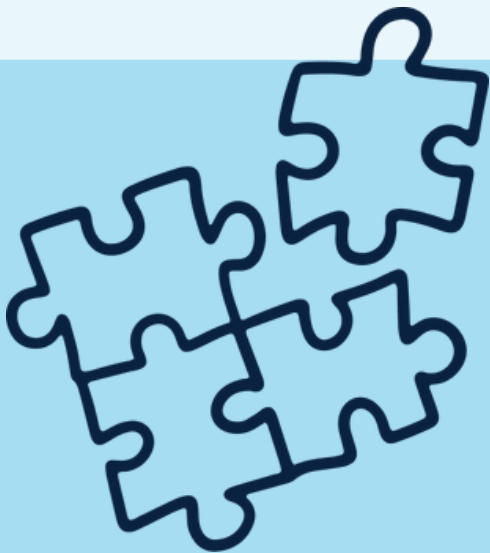
## Family & Community Engagement

- Host a welcome back event (coffee, open house, or meet-and-greet) to build early connections.
- Be active on social media to share positive moments and keep families informed.

WEEK TWO

# Strengthening Instruction & Collaboration

Instructional leadership and  
communication



**Why it matters:** Strong early guidance keeps learning on track and builds trust with all stakeholders.

# Instructional Leadership

## Launch Walkthroughs

- Start to conduct regular, informal visits and gather early trends
- Provide 1–2 pieces of timely, strengths-based feedback after each walkthrough.
- Begin drafting a yearlong PD calendar based on what you're seeing in classrooms.

## Strengthen PLCs

- Establish PLCs with weekly or biweekly meetings focused on collaboration and student learning.
- Center discussions on real classroom challenges and instructional strategies.
- Pair new teachers with veteran mentors for support, curriculum guidance, and classroom management tips.

# Communication & Engagement

## Keep Stakeholders Informed

- Send a welcome message or video to share school priorities, values, and your excitement for the year.
- Share a consistent communication plan so families and staff know what to expect and how to stay connected.

## Build Relationships

- Host events like Back-to-School Night to help families meet staff, see classrooms, and ask questions.
- Stay visible during arrival, lunch, and dismissal —these informal moments help build familiarity and trust.

## Open Feedback Loops

- Check in on well-being and support needs early in the year.
- Form a Parent & Community Advisory Council to gather input and strengthen shared decision-making.



WEEK THREE

# Monitoring Progress & Adjusting Strategies

Identify early trends and respond effectively



**Why it matters:** Early insights prevent small issues from growing into bigger ones.

# Assess and Adjust

## Classroom & Staff Check-Ins

- Stop by and check in with your staff when you can—it's a great way to show your presence to students and get a feel for how things are going for teachers in the first few days of school.
- Look and listen for patterns—challenges with pacing, classroom culture, or operational routines.

## Monitor Early Data

- Review early attendance and behavior trends to identify students who may need support.
- Compare beginning-of-year assessments to prior data or benchmarks to spot instructional gaps early.

# Strengthen Family Engagement

## Host a Family Night (Open House)

- Include a leadership Q&A, classroom visits, and tables for signing up to volunteer or support upcoming events.
- Offer short tech trainings to help families use important platforms like the online gradebook, communication tools, or school apps.
- Create a welcoming, informal atmosphere with refreshments, student work displays, or partner tables from local organizations.

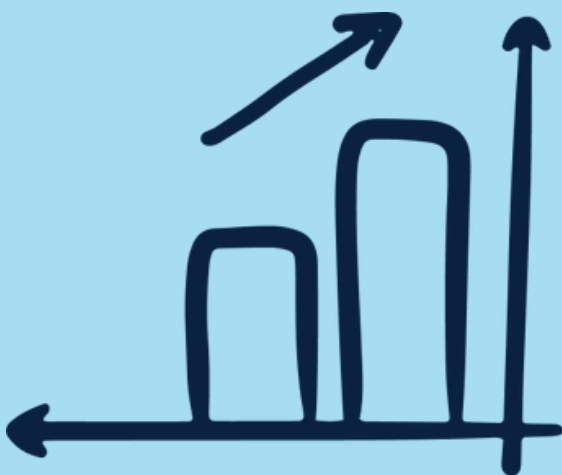
## Keep Communication Going

- Launch a family engagement page or private group where you can regularly share updates, photos, and announcements.
- Send weekly or biweekly principal newsletters that include highlights from the week, upcoming events, reminders, and celebrations to keep families informed and connected.

WEEK FOUR

# Sustaining Momentum & Setting Long-Term Goals

Reinforce culture + align around long-term vision



## Why it matters:

Momentum fades without intention. Help your team stay focused and inspired.

# Solidify Leadership Practices

## Model a Solutions-Oriented Mindset

- Reflect regularly on small wins and areas for growth—use moments of challenge as opportunities to lead with optimism and clarity.
- Follow our Little Wins newsletter for ideas to celebrate progress and reinforce positive momentum with your staff.

## Stay Clear & Present

- Be visible and accessible through regular walk-throughs, hallway check-ins, and informal conversations.
- Use consistent, clear messaging in meetings, emails, and newsletters to build trust and alignment across your school.

# Lead with Growth

## Set Shared Goals with Staff

- Use early reflections and classroom trends to co-create 1–2 team or grade-level goals.
- Invite staff to set personal goals aligned to their values or areas of focus for the year.
- Revisit these goals mid-quarter in check-ins or PLCs to celebrate progress and offer support.

## Be Transparent

- Share your own leadership reflections during meetings or newsletters to normalize growth and model continuous improvement.
- Talk openly about your learning process and the “why” behind key decisions.

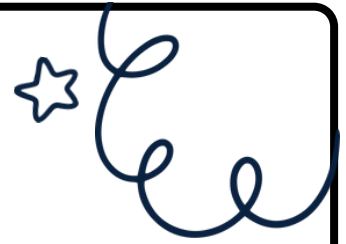
# 1:1 CHECK-IN NOTES TEMPLATE



# Staff Check-In

Name

Date



→ One win they shared:

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→ How they're feeling about the year so far:

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→ One way I can support or celebrate them:

---

→ Personal note (e.g., family, hobbies, interests):

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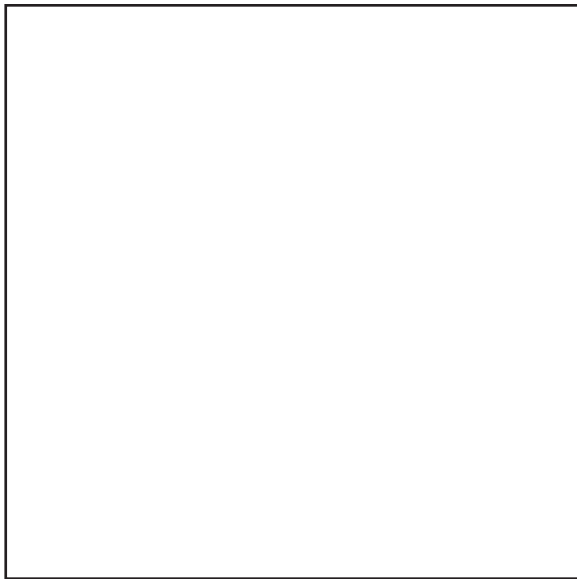
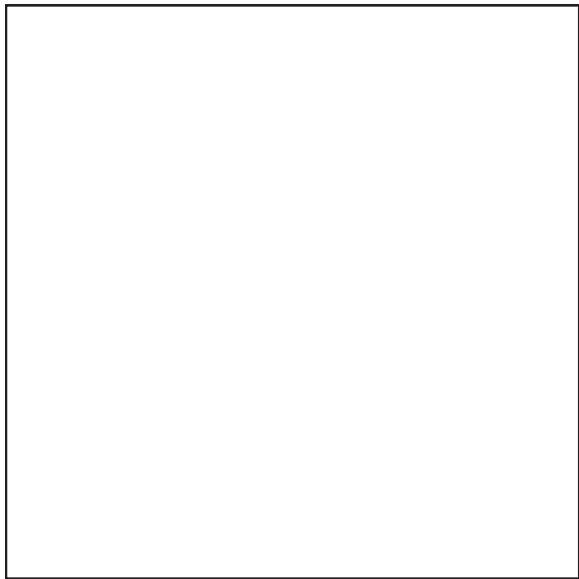
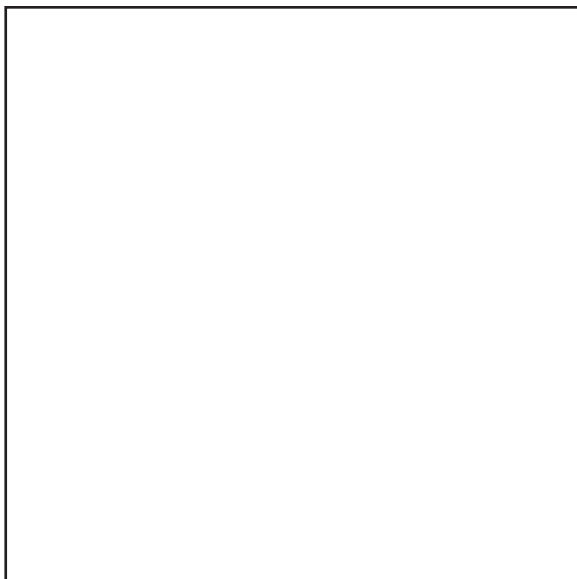
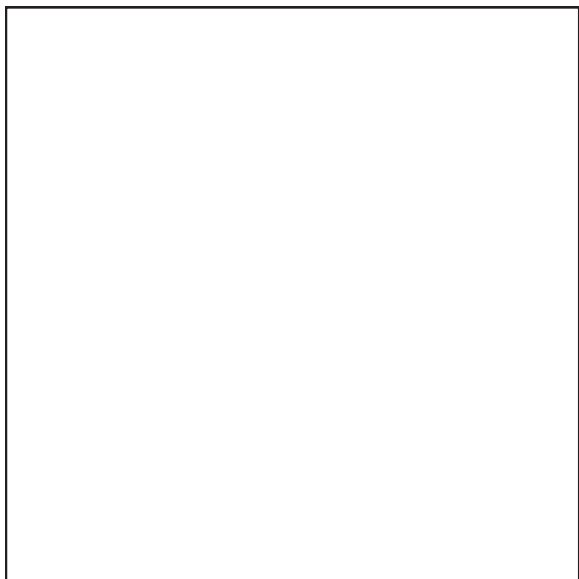
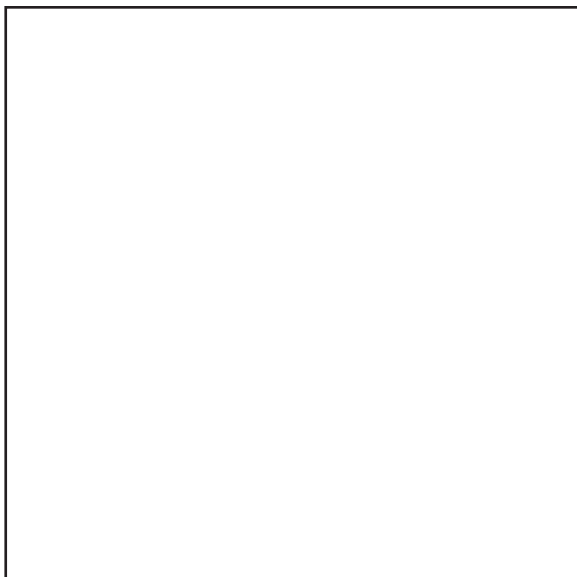
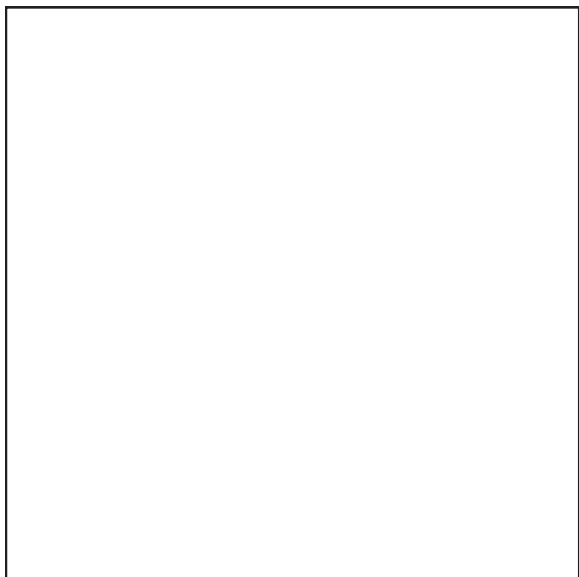
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# **STICKY NOTE REFLECTION CARD**

- 1. Print the blank guide below**
- 2. Place 3x3 sticky notes on the guide (sticky side up, arrows pointing up).**
- 3. Set printer to "full size" (no scaling).**
- 4. Load guide so arrows enter the printer first and print.**







### My Little Wins From the Week:

☐ One thing that's going well

---

☐ One small success I'm proud of

---

☐ One thing I want to improve

---

☐ How I'd like to be supported

---

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# **STAFF CELEBRATION NOTES**



**HANDS DOWN,  
YOU'RE THE BEST!**



*Handwriting practice line with four loops.*

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YOU'RE THE BEST!**



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**HANDS DOWN,  
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**HANDS DOWN,  
YOU'RE THE BEST!**



*Handwriting practice line with four loops.*

**HIGH FIVE!**  
**YOU'RE AWESOME!**



llll

**HIGH FIVE!**  
**YOU'RE AWESOME!**



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**HIGH FIVE!**  
**YOU'RE AWESOME!**



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**HIGH FIVE!**  
**YOU'RE AWESOME!**



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# WE'RE SO GLAD YOU'RE HERE!

Thanks for downloading this resource—at [Alpaca](#), we're on a mission to **make school the happiest place to work**.



## Tried an activity?

Send a photo or a staff testimonial to [our team](#), and we'll send you a coffee on us!



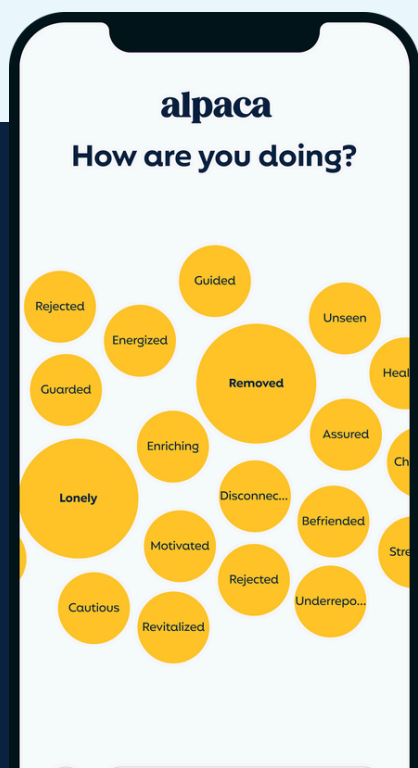
## Got an idea brewing?

We love co-creating with school leaders—[drop us a line](#) with any resource ideas you'd love to see next.



## Explore more!

Check out our [full resource library](#) for creative, ready-to-use tools to support you and your team.



## SEE HOW ALPACA WORKS

Beautiful surveys, delightful care packages, and real insights on teacher wellbeing—everything you need to lead with confidence, all in one simple solution. [Book a quick demo!](#)