JOY ~JOURNEY OPTIONS YOUCHOOSE®

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK

The U.S. Education System

Orientation to U.S. Education for International Teachers

"Everything you wish someone had told you before Day One."

YOUR NAME _____

START DATE _____

SCHOOL / DISTRICT _____

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Participant Workbook: The U.S. Education System
Orientation to U.S. Education for International Teachers

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WELCOME

What's Inside Your Workbook

This workbook is your companion guide. Complete each section as you move through the lesson, in order. Print it double-sided or keep it open digitally in a second window. Either way, use it. The act of writing turns information into knowledge.

1	**Before We Begin** A 5-minute reflection on where you are coming from	Page 4
2	**Journal Prompts** 5 guided prompts, one for each major section of the lesson. Complete each as you reach that section.	Page 5
3	**Scenario Activities** "The License That Didn't Transfer" and "The Missing 504 Plan." Write your response BEFORE reading the recommended approach in the lesson.	Page 7
4	**Pause & Consolidate** Quick recall exercises to test your memory	Page 11
5	**Wrap-Up Reflection** Questions to lock in your learning	Page 12
6	**Action Tools** Your First-Week Checklist and Your Day One Survival Guide	Page 13
7	**Notes** Space for questions and ideas to bring to your school	Page 16

QUIZ

Your lesson quiz is taken online in the course, right after you finish this workbook.

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SECTION 1

Before We Begin: A Moment to Reflect

01

Take 3 to 5 minutes to answer these questions before starting the course. Your honest answers will make this course more meaningful.

Your Own Classroom Memories

Think of a classroom you were taught in as a child. What made it feel safe? What made it feel challenging? How might those memories shape the kind of teacher you want to be in the U.S.?

Where Are You Coming From?

Write 2 to 3 sentences about your home country's education system. What did classrooms look, feel, and sound like? What was the teacher's role?

What Brought You Here?

What motivated you to teach in the United States? What are you most excited about? What are you most nervous about?

What's Your Biggest Question?

Write down the single most important thing you want to understand about U.S. schools by the time you finish this course. Keep it visible. We'll come back to it.

There are no right or wrong answers here. This course meets you where you are. Your background is an asset, not a barrier.

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SECTION 2 · PART 1 OF 2

Journal Prompts

02

Write your responses as you move through the lesson, or return here after each section.

Before the Lesson: Your Education System at Home

From the "How U.S. Education Is Structured" intro, answer before reading further. How is education structured in your home country? What did classrooms look, feel, and sound like? What was the teacher's role? What do you expect will be different here?

After the "Did You Know?" Facts: Your Honest Reaction

Which of these facts surprises you most: 50 separate state systems, about 15% of students receiving special education services, more than 5 million English learners, the scale of annual K-12 spending, or your legal obligations from Day One? Which one concerns you most? Write your honest reaction.

After "The K-12 System at a Glance": What Surprised You?

What is the most surprising thing you learned about how U.S. schools are structured? How does it compare to what you expected?

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SECTION 2 · PART 2 OF 2

Journal Prompts

02

After "Who Runs the Schools?": Governance Comparison

How does U.S. school governance (federal, state, district, principal) compare to your home country? Who holds the most power in your home system? Who holds it here? What surprises you most about how U.S. schools are governed?

After "Key Terms": Your Personal Glossary

Write down the 3 terms that feel most important for you to master before Day One. Why did you choose these three?

Term 1 _____

Because _____

Term 2 _____

Because _____

Term 3 _____

Because _____

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SECTION 3 · SCENARIO 1

The License That Didn't Transfer 03

Read the scenario from the lesson, then write your response BEFORE reading the recommended approach.

You are an experienced teacher from the Philippines with 8 years of classroom experience. You have just accepted a teaching position at a public high school in Texas. Before leaving home, a recruiter told you that your international teaching credentials and experience would be recognized in the U.S., so you didn't worry much about paperwork.

You arrive in Texas two weeks before school starts. During new-teacher orientation, the HR coordinator asks to see your Texas teaching certificate. You hand over your home country credentials and your university transcripts. She looks confused and says: "These are great, but you need a Texas state teaching certificate to be in the classroom. Have you applied for one?"

You haven't. You assumed your credentials transferred automatically. School starts in 14 days.

My Initial Reaction

What is your gut reaction? How do you feel? What do you want to do first?

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SCENARIO 1 · CONTINUED

My Planned Response

What specific steps would you take? Who would you contact? What would you say to the HR coordinator and your principal?

COMPARE YOUR PLAN

Return to the lesson to read the Common Missteps and Recommended Approach slides. Compare your plan to the expert response. What would you do differently? Licensing rules differ by state, so always confirm requirements with your state's Department of Education.

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SECTION 3 · SCENARIO 2

03

The Missing 504 Plan

Read the scenario from the lesson, then write your response BEFORE reading the recommended approach.

It is the end of your second week. A parent emails you directly, upset that her daughter, a student with a 504 Plan, has not been receiving her testing accommodations (extra time and a quiet room).

You were never told about the 504 Plan. You check your files and confirm that no one gave you a copy. The parent is asking for an explanation and wants to know what you plan to do about the two quizzes her daughter already took without accommodations.

Your department head is copied on the email.

My Initial Reaction

What is your gut reaction? What is the first thing you want to say?

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SCENARIO 2 · CONTINUED

My Planned Response

What would you do in the next hour? Who would you contact? What would you write back to the parent?

COMPARE YOUR PLAN

Return to the lesson to compare your plan to the recommended approach. What did you do differently? What will you remember for your own classroom?

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SECTION 4

Pause & Consolidate: Quick Recall

04

Before checking your notes, write your answers from memory. This is retrieval practice.

What are the 3 levels of school governance?

Write them in order from broadest to most local.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Name 4 key acronyms from this lesson

Write what each stands for.

IEP = _____

EL / ELL = _____

RTI = _____

504 = _____

Core Insight Check

Complete this sentence without looking back:

"There is no single national curriculum in the U.S. because..."

_____

_____

_____

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SECTION 5

Wrap-Up Reflection

05

Take 3 minutes. Answer these questions before moving on to the lesson quiz.

What surprised you most?

Was there anything about how U.S. schools are structured that challenged your assumptions or expectations?

What clicked?

Which concept or term finally made sense to you? Write it down in your own words.

What's still unclear?

Identify one thing you want to revisit or ask about before you move forward.

How does this compare?

Think about the education system in your home country. What is the biggest structural difference you've noticed so far?

Revisit Your Biggest Question

Look back at the question you wrote in Section 1. Did this lesson answer it? What do you still want to find out?

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SECTION 6 · ACTION TOOL 1

Your First-Week Checklist

06

A day-by-day action guide for your first 5 days in the classroom. Check each item as you complete it.

Before Day 1: Know Your Students' Legal Plans

- ☐ Request a complete list of all IEPs and 504 Plans for your students from the special education coordinator
- ☐ Read each plan and note the required accommodations
- ☐ Confirm you understand your legal obligations for each student

Day 1: Establish Your Presence

- ☐ Post your classroom rules and procedures where every student can see them
- ☐ Learn (or begin learning) every student's name. Use a seating chart.
- ☐ Introduce yourself: your background, your expectations, your communication style
- ☐ Greet students at the door

Day 2: Communicate Your Grading Policy

- ☐ Distribute or display your grading policy in writing
- ☐ Explain how grades are calculated and how late work is handled
- ☐ Introduce yourself to your department chair and at least 2 colleagues
- ☐ Locate and read your school's student handbook

Day 3: Confirm Your Support Systems

- ☐ Confirm every accommodation from your students' IEPs and 504 Plans is built into your lesson plans and assessments
- ☐ Set up your gradebook (digital or paper)
- ☐ Identify your go-to support staff: counselor, special education coordinator, department chair

Day 4: Set Up Your Systems

- ☐ Establish your communication system with parents (email, app, newsletter)
- ☐ Review your school's testing calendar

Day 5: Reflect and Adjust

- ☐ What is working well in your classroom routines?
- ☐ What needs adjustment before next week?

MY WEEK 2 PRIORITY

TIP

Don't try to do everything perfectly in Week 1. Focus on safety, predictability, and connection. Content delivery comes after students trust you and know your expectations.

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SECTION 6 · ACTION TOOL 2

Your Day One Survival Guide

06

An hour-by-hour plan for your very first day in the classroom. Goal: establish safety, predictability, and connection, not content delivery.

Before Students Arrive (30 minutes before the bell)

- Arrange desks and post your seating chart
- Write your name and the class name/period on the board
- Place a "Day 1 Welcome" task on each desk (for example, "Write your name and 3 things I should know about you")
- Have your attendance sheet ready
- Take 3 deep breaths. You are ready.

First 10 Minutes: Welcome & Introductions

- Greet students at the door by name (use your roster)
- Once seated, introduce yourself: name, where you're from, why you teach
- Ask students to complete the welcome task on their desk
- Share 1 or 2 personal facts that humanize you

Minutes 10–30: Introduce Your Rules & Expectations

- Walk through your classroom rules (posted on the wall)
- Explain your grading policy in simple terms
- Describe how you communicate with students and parents
- Answer questions. Keep it calm and clear.

Minutes 30–50: Practice Your Routines

- Practice entering and exiting the classroom
- Practice the signal you'll use to get attention (clap, bell, countdown)
- Practice the procedure for turning in work
- Celebrate: "You just learned how this classroom works."

Last 5 Minutes: Exit Ticket

- Ask students to write on a notecard: "One thing you're looking forward to in this class" and "One question you have for me"
- Collect the cards and read them tonight
- Dismiss students calmly, by row or group

DAY ONE COMPLETE

Tonight, read your exit ticket cards. Note any student who seemed disengaged, anxious, or confused. Follow up tomorrow. The relationships you build in Week 1 will carry you through the entire year.

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SECTION 6 · ACTION TOOL 2

Day One Reflection

06

Write here tonight, after your first day.

What went better than expected?

What would I do differently tomorrow?

One student I want to check in with

Why? What did you notice?

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SECTION 7

07

My Notes

Questions, ideas, and reminders to bring to your school.

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