

# Effective Student Orientations

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Setting the Stage for Student Success



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Institute for the Professional Development of Adult Educators

SETTING THE STAGE FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

## Effective Student Orientations Handbook

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Ashley Yopp, Bureau Chief, Adult and Career Education  
Florida Department of Education  
Division of Career, Technical, and Adult Education

Rachel Ludwig, Director of Adult Education Professional Development &  
Provider Performance  
Florida Department of Education  
Division of Career, Technical, and Adult Education

June Rall, Director of IPDAE  
Tamara Serrano, Training and Curriculum Design Facilitator for IPDAE

### **Webinar Facilitator**

Alexandre Ramirez, Accreditation Compliance Officer,  
Miami-Dade County Public Schools



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Institute for the Professional Development of Adult Educators  
3209 Virginia Avenue - Fort Pierce, FL 34981  
Phone 772-462-7409 • E-mail [info@floridaipdae.org](mailto:info@floridaipdae.org)

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## Considerations and Desired Outcomes

*Setting specific goals for the new student orientation program at a school will facilitate the organization of the program, ensuring that outcomes align with the school's mission and vision.*

### **Introduction:**

When developing a new student orientation, it is important that educators and school administrators consider not only the organizational and logistical requirements for the successful implementation of the program, but also the tone, goals, and delivery as it pertains to school climate. Student orientations offer educators an opportunity to both inform and acclimate new students. Establishing a set of goals is the very first step in designing an effective student orientation. The goals for the orientation program should be specific and consider policies, procedures, program information, and the student progression timeline. New student orientation programs provide students with exposure to the culture and climate of the school, its teachers and student services staff, and the rest of the student body. During a new student orientation, it is also important to think of the logistical and student services needs of your student population. Many schools issue ID cards, parking decals, and conduct academic advisement during the orientation program. As a school develops its new student orientation program, it is important to consider the most relevant information which needs to be delivered and the time available for the orientation program.

### **Program Delivery and Tone:**

A school's new student orientation program offers a unique opportunity to provide an excellent first impression and welcome to the school. Excellent customer service during the orientation program will not only help students feel welcome at the institution, but also increase student retention, establish a relationship, and inform students of all expectations. The tone of delivery should be friendly and welcoming. This is the first opportunity for new students to begin to acclimate to the school's climate and culture. Counselors, teachers, and school administrators should collaborate to deliver a student orientation program that is closely aligned with the mission and vision of the school. The inclusion of counselors or academic advisors is a critical component in establishing good relationships with new students.

As schools consider the delivery methods and tone of delivery for their student orientation program, keep the following in mind:

- Orientations should be closely aligned with the mission and vision of the school
- The delivery method may vary; however, it is important to keep all information relevant and engaging.
- Excellent customer service is a must in establishing good relationships with new students and providing a stable groundwork for high student retention.

### **Establishing Goals:**

Here are some important questions to ask when determining what goals are most important in the new student orientation program at a school:

*What programs and program information should be conveyed to students?*

- i.e. program length; testing requirements; IET CTE programs and curriculum frameworks; and the student progression timeline.

*What important student services information should be conveyed to students?*

- i.e. hours of operation for the counseling/advisement office; availability of financial aid; location of student services centers; registration dates; holidays, teacher planning days, and vacation dates; registration and enrollment process; job placement services; and

*What campus information is most relevant?*

- i.e. hours of operation for various offices; parking information and parking decals; security requirements and ID policies; location of service centers, restrooms, libraries/media centers, and cafeterias;

*What health, safety, and emergency procedures and information must be shared with students in accordance with school and/or district policies?*

- i.e. lockdown codes and procedures; hard corner locations; location of first aid kits, defibrillators, and eyewash stations; fire safety exit routes and exit diagram locations; and emergency exit locations.

## Preparation, Planning, and Structure/Layout

*Whether in-person or virtual, new student orientation programs should be organized to support the needs of a school's student population needs.*

### **Preparation and Planning:**

Preparation and planning for an effective new student orientation program requires collaboration between teachers, test proctors, counselors, job placement specialist, registrars, and school site administrators. Orientation schedules should be brief and should align with class scheduling. For schools implementing a multi-day orientation process, scheduling should remain consistent throughout the program. Collaboration between staff is critical in determining both the pertinent information that needs to be delivered to the student and the best process for pre-testing, issuing identification badges, and assigning parking decals. Counselor input is particularly valuable during the planning stage as many effective orientations provide students with academic advisement and/or career counseling. Test proctors can provide scheduling assistance for required pretesting as well as the testing road map to program completion. As a school prepares its orientation program, considerations in class size and delivery method should be discussed with staff.

### **Selecting an Appropriate Structure/Layout:**

Depending on the amount of information, total number of students, and time constraints, educators may opt to conduct their new student orientation program as a single day or multi-day in-person event or a virtual orientation. There are benefits to each layout. Conducting an in-person event allows school staff, teachers, counselors, and administrators to personally meet new students, engage in relationship building, and provide excellent customer service. Conducting a virtual new student orientation program benefits from flexibility to the student and reduced resource expenditures, as many virtual orientations can be recorded and uploaded to a school's website. The needs of a school and student population will dictate which layout is most appropriate. An effective format is a hybrid orientation that has a physical component supplemented by digital/virtual resources.

Hybrid new student orientation programs take place primarily on the physical campus of the school but are supplemented by pre-recorded materials which are available to students at their convenience. These materials are usually loaded onto a student resources page. This format or layout is effective due to the multiple redundancy of the delivery method. Students will have access to orientation materials beyond the completion of the orientation program, providing them with information they may have lost or forgotten during the in-person orientation program. Recording successful in-person student orientation programs is an effective method for building a library of student resources.

## Components of an Engaging Orientation Presentation

*Engaging delivery and relevant content will ensure student engagement remains high during the delivery of important information.*

### **Delivery Method and Layout Considerations:**

Engaging students during the orientation process involved diversifying the delivery of information in addition to breaking up long presentations with other activities such as academic advisement and the issuance of student identification badges. During the presentation portion of the student orientation program, school counselors, teachers, case managers, and/or administrators will focus on delivering all pertinent and critical information to students. School staff are encouraged to use PowerPoint, Canva, or Sway to deliver engaging presentations. Due to the often-lengthy list of information that needs to be provided to students, school staff and teachers may want to include breaks during the presentation. This allows students a moment to digest the information and remain engaged. If the orientation program is being held in-person, it is good practice to allow students to introduce themselves to each other and to the school's teachers and staff. Additionally, utilizing mini quizzes and engaging activities such as Kahoots can increase student engagement during the presentations. For virtual orientations, the use of online quizzes and surveys as well as an allotted time for introductions can help break up long information sessions while providing students with an opportunity to e-meet one another.

Although the requirement for each school will vary, there are universal components or pieces of information that are important to share with students during an effective new student orientation.

### Important Components/Information:

- Mission, vision, and values of the school
- School Information (i.e. accreditation, IET programs, school district information, brief history)
- Hours of operation for each department
- Student services available
- Safety and Security Information
- Emergency drills/ codes/ hard corners
- Health and safety information/ first-aid kits/ defibrillators, eye wash stations
- Course structure (i.e. total number of hours in term) and schedules
- Curriculum overview
- List of IET programs and local CTE feeder schools
- Counseling/ course & career advisement
- Important events (i.e. job/career fairs, industry visits, or career advisement sessions)
- Student contract
- Student handbook
- Important conduct/ disciplinary considerations
- Attendance and attendance requirements
- Testing
- Dress code (if applicable)
- Electronic devices/ internet use/ technology policies
- Media center (if applicable) availability and resources
- Parking and student identification badges
- Available clubs and/or extra-curricular activities
- Job placement
- Career and technical education transition services



## Student Resources, Testing, and School Procedures

*Providing students with a dedicated student resources webpage is a great step in providing excellent customer service in the virtual space. Information regarding testing and school procedures should be shared with students as early in the orientation process as possible.*

### **Student Resources Webpage:**

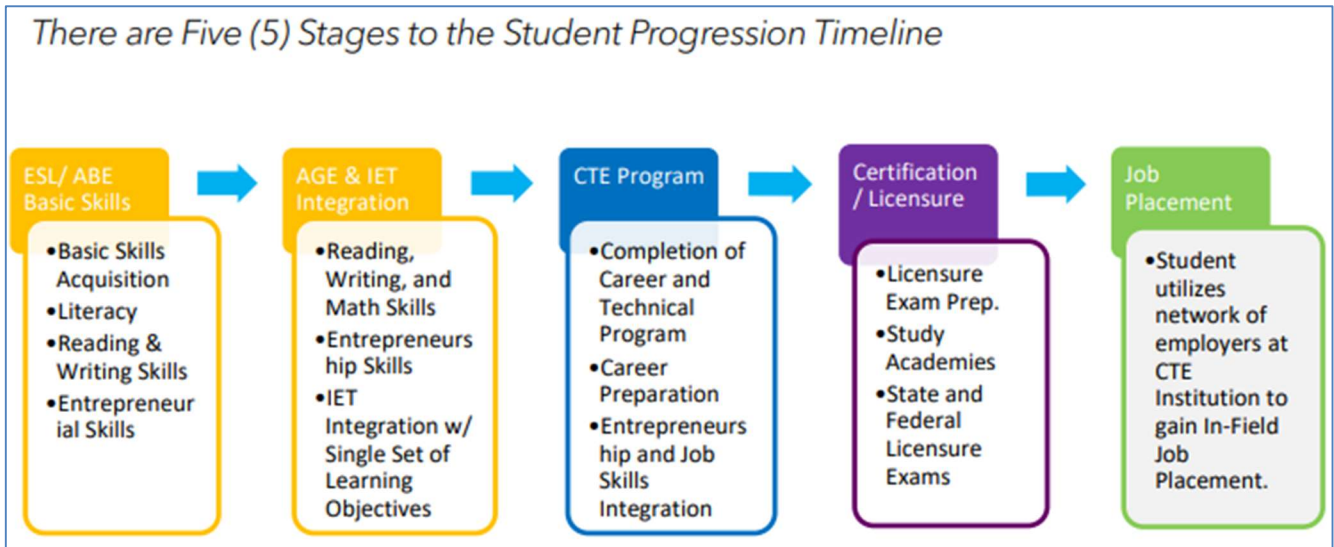
Providing students with access to a student resources webpage facilitates the distribution of important information. Students should have access to reference materials regarding school policies and procedures, operational information such as hours of operation, student progression steps, and dates and times for important events. The provision of access to the student resources webpage is not only an important component of the new student orientation process but also of the provision of excellent customer service in the virtual space. Many prospective students will search a school's website prior to enrollment. Providing future students will access to important program and school information can establish a good first impression while educating students prior to their first visit to the school. In today's information age, providing students with ease of access to important information is a primary component of providing excellent customer service in a virtual environment.

### **Student Progression Timeline:**

To effectively prepare students to succeed in the modern economy, adult educators will support the integration of Career and Technical Education (CTE) skills and competencies into adult education (ABE & ESL) programs by using the Integrated Education and Training (IET) Model. This model expands on the set of instructional objectives by adding CTE job preparation basic skills and content, providing students with a seamless transition into workforce training. This not only prepares students to succeed in CTE programs but also lays the foundation for critical entrepreneurial skills required in all industries. This level of preparation will provide students with the best opportunity for in-field job placement, while simultaneously preparing them to succeed in their careers.

To successfully prepare students for their career placement, educators will follow students through the Student Progression Timeline from its origins in adult education to its final goal of in-field job placement. This timeline depicts student growth through the various stages of adult education and into the transition stages to career and technical education. This invaluable investment in the local economy ensures that educators are preparing students to succeed, ensuring the successful growth of local industries and businesses, and providing ample microeconomic growth and job opportunities to new program

completers. Providing students with this timeline will not only help them organize their educational goals, but also provide them with encouragement as they advance through its various stages.



### Testing and School Procedures:

As educators cover important information regarding curriculum, student resources, and the student progression timeline, it is crucial for information regarding testing procedures, schedules, and requirements to be distributed to students. Testing is an important component of both integrated education and training adult programs and career and technical education programs. Basic skills assessments and certification and licensure examinations are important components of workforce preparation. Providing information to students regarding important testing procedures can empower the student while clarifying complicated licensure requirements. During this portion of the orientation, clarification in navigating the road to licensure for offered career and technical education programs can be facilitated using easy-to-read roadmaps such as the one below:



## Counseling and 504 Plans

*It is important to create a safe and welcoming school climate for students. Counselors, teachers, and administrators should always encourage the self-disclosure of any disabilities or needed accommodations.*

### **Counseling & 504 Plans:**

During a school's new student orientation program, expanding on information regarding counseling and academic advisement services should be covered during the initial presentation. An important component of the student orientation process is counseling or advisement. During this component of the program, students will meet with counselors and/or academic advisors to discuss possible academic and/or career goals as well as available programs at the school and feeder pattern technical colleges. This discussion not only provides students with an opportunity to discuss possible career and job placement avenues, but also a nexus for discovering the career and technical occupations linked with the schools integrated education and training programs. These discussions may also involve the discussion of critical microeconomic data related to job growth, wages, job availability, demographic distribution, and career paths related to career and technical programs offered at nearby technical colleges. This first counseling/advisement session acts as an "entry interview" for students.

Effective new student orientation programs offer students the opportunity to confidentially disclose any needs regarding accommodations or disabilities. School counselors should be friendly and encourage students that require accommodations to speak about having a 504 Plan placed on their student record. It is important that special emphasis be placed on the fact that these plans can only be brought about confidentially and as a product of student self-disclosure.

## Exit Interviews and Job Placement

*Exit Interviews are a critical follow-up step in ensuring continuity in a student's education.*

### **Exit Interviews:**

Exit interviews are an important component of the student progression timeline. During exit interviews, counselors and academic advisors collaborate with teachers to provide students with a plan for their future career endeavors. At this point in many Integrated Education and Training programs, advisors will direct students to their local technical college to facilitate the transition to their chosen career and technical education program. Students may, at this point, choose to pivot to a different career and technical or higher education program. The exit interview serves as an opportunity for students to review their academic progress, interests, and future career goals with the school's counselors or academic advisors. Exit interviews are introduced to students during an effective new student orientation program. They provide the student with a thorough understanding of their own progression with the program while assuring them of support during the transition period to a career and technical or higher education program.

### **Job Placement:**

Many Integrated Education and Training students will complete their adult education program having completed a portion of a career and technical education certificate. In many cases, having completed the first occupational completion point of the program will qualify them for entry level employment. In-field workforce placement is a critical component of all effective career and technical education programs. If an adult education institution maintains a career or job placement specialist, it is critical for those personnel to be directly involved in the exit interview process. For schools without job placement or career specialists, collaboration with the local feeder technical college for the selected career and technical education program is necessary to ensure that students who are eligible for in-field job placement receive an employment opportunity prior to or during transition.

# Virtual Student Orientations

*In today's changing educational landscape, virtual orientations provide educators with a resource effective method for reaching out to students on their own time.*

## **Virtual Considerations:**

To ensure a great virtual student orientation experience, make sure all program information is available in one centralized, accessible location such as a designated orientation or new student information webpage. Share key orientation and list programs and schedules in an orientation agenda. Sharing the agenda beforehand allows students to know exactly what they can expect during their orientation experience and creates a welcoming, supportive environment for students who may be feeling anxious as they enter a new school. Often, new students have many questions about the school's procedures and policies. Facilitating the access information on advising, financial aid, parking, academic policies, procedures, and other school resources is especially important in a virtual setting where students cannot simply ask someone directly. Centralizing this critical information allows students and their families to review at their convenience and as many times as needed.

Offering recorded sessions, outline requirements, FAQs, tips, and checklists also replaces the need for staff to share the same information over and over at multiple sessions. Advisors and staff are able to engage in meaningful conversations during info sessions instead of repeating themselves, and with an online, web-hosted orientation library, a school is able to customize the experience and share specific information at designated times when students need it.

Tracking how students feel about orientation programming is a critical need and opportunity to adjust and optimize as needed. Utilize student surveys after each new student orientation and gauge if students enjoyed the program and felt welcome and included. Ensure to track needs by asking students what they felt was missing from the virtual orientation experience or what did not go well in their opinion. Student feedback is among the best tools for evaluating the effectiveness of a student orientation program.

## Peer-reviewed Resources:

Chan, M. (2017). Have you been oriented? an analysis of new student orientation and E-orientation programs at U.S. community colleges. *College and University*, 92(2), 12-25. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/have-you-been-oriented-analysis-new-student/docview/1922864443/se-2>

Hollins, T. N. (n.d.). Examining the Impact of a Comprehensive Approach to Student Orientation. *Inquiry*, 14(N1), 15–27. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ833916>