

Curriculum Leadership Institute E-Hint

Hints for New Teachers

Every year many new educators enter the classroom for the first time. With so much emphasis on testing these days, some important issues can get overlooked in the orientation process. Those crucial areas include classroom management, organization, and communication. A few simple suggestions can make a big difference in the overall success of the year, so consider placing these hints in your new teachers' packets.

Classroom Management

The first suggestion is to assign seats to all students. If you are unfamiliar with your new students, a seating chart makes it easier to call them by name. A seating arrangement also allows you a little more classroom control so you can set the tone for the year.

Spend a few days at the beginning of the year outlining your expectations. Regardless of their age, students can be held responsible for their own actions. "Time to Teach," a behavior management program, supports instructing students through teacher and student modeling of what is considered acceptable, unacceptable, and what falls in-between. For example, demonstrating the inappropriate way for students to walk down the hallway will not only entertain them for the moment, but will put a picture in their minds for months to come. Therefore, you won't have to use valuable instruction time to continually review that particular behavior, which leaves you "Time to Teach."

Set boundaries. If you develop rules, follow them. Be consistent and fair. If you say there will be a consequence or reward for behavior, then be sure to keep your word. Allow students to feel a part of the classroom by asking for their suggestions. If you have already utilized the "Time to Teach" approach, students may want to model their expectations too.

It is important to keep students in the classroom as much as possible so they can learn. Sending students out of the room for every discipline issue sends the message that the teacher is not in control. Nonverbal cues can be effective and allow you to continue with a lesson. However, if the student's behavior is a disruption to others or him/herself, then removal may be the only option.

Organization

Get organized! This is a key for success in any profession. The most important task you face every day is to teach. Get lesson plans completed, copies made, and materials located for the upcoming week before the week even begins and your life will be a lot less stressful.

After all of the materials are collected, they should be placed in a designated area where they can easily be found. Individual file folders labeled for each hour (or subject area) can hold graded papers, papers needing grading, or copies to be used. If a student has been absent and missed an important assignment, place the student's name on a copy of the assignment

and put it back in the folder for the appropriate class period/subject area. When you see the student's name on the paper in the folder, it will be a reminder that the student needs to receive the assignment. Older students can be directed to the "copy folder" to pick up their own assignments.

Before you go home every evening, gather all the hands-on materials you need for the next day. Counting out supplies and planning student groupings the day before will eliminate wasted time and allow students more time on task during the class period.

An "emergency" folder for substitute teachers needs to be prepared. Elementary teachers: include a list of all of your students, special instructions for individuals, and the starting/ending times for each subject area. Secondary teachers: do the same, but create separate lists for each class period. Have a specific lesson in this folder that the substitute could use for each class period/subject area in case you have an unexpected absence. If you save all of the information electronically, you can easily modify your instructions for each *planned* absence throughout the year.

Communication

Communicating effectively with parents, students, and staff members establishes great rapport. If a student has improved in an area, inform the parent(s) through an email or phone call. When a parent sends an email, makes a phone call, or wants to set up an appointment, it is important to respond as soon as possible. Find something positive to mention about the student at the beginning and end of the conversation. Keep the principal informed of any serious issues so there won't be surprises in the future.

If students are going to progress through learning, feedback is required. Feedback not only helps guide the teacher's instruction, it allows the student opportunity for self-assessment. Specific comments on papers, rather than a blanket "needs improvement" or "good job," help students better understand what they are doing well and not so well. It is also very important to return assessments as soon as possible in order for students to evaluate their learning.

General

It is impossible to have every procedure written in the "New Teacher's Handbook" so don't hesitate to ask questions. The secretary, custodian, veteran teachers, and paraprofessionals are great resources of information. They are often delighted to share their experiences. Be thankful of their knowledge and appreciative of their time. Communicate with team teachers on topics where you could collaborate or do some cross-curricular instruction. When students experience material in multiple settings, they have an easier time putting it into context and retaining their learning.

All of these suggestions are just support for the real goal of student learning. However, by setting up an effective classroom environment, organizing your time and materials, and keeping lines of communication open, the contact time with students will be more productive.