

Strategies for a new year

by Alisa James

Lesson planning, class control and discipline, working with parents and the administration, establishing a rapport with students—these are important concerns you have to deal with on a daily basis. The following hints address these important facets of teaching and can help make the first few days of school and your whole year go a little more smoothly.

Hints for Motivating Students

- Look your best, and make sure your body language speaks positively so students feel you are approachable.
- Always find time to listen to students, even if it is before or after school. Let them know you care.
- Play with your students at recess. They get to see that you are human and make mistakes too. You get a chance to interact with kids in a less supervised environment and gain even more insights into their behavior.
- Be consistent in how you deal with all students, so they will learn to trust and count on you.
- Get in tune with what music, TV shows, and sports teams your students are interested in. Let them bring in music for warm-ups, station work, and so on. (But be sure to listen to the tape before you play it.)
- Establish a Winner's Circle for highlighting good sportsmanship, self-control, responsibility, and great plays. Give awards for "Sport of the Month" and "Classroom Sport of the Month."
- When disciplining a student make it clear that you don't have a problem with the child, but with the behavior. Be caring and respectful, even when dealing with misbehavior.
- Keep a discipline log (anecdotal record) to help improve your consistency with discipline. Record specific inappropriate behaviors and how you handled them.

Hints for Organizing and Teaching Lessons

- Establish your classroom protocols right away; post and practice them the first day and throughout the year. Include both safety and management protocols, such as a set start and stop signal.
- Use as few words as possible when giving directions. Say "how" before you say "what." For example, say "With your basketball, quickly and quietly walk to your space" instead of "Walk with your basketball..." because "walk" is the signal to go!
- Put numbers on the floor or blacktop and assign a number to each child. This is then the place to go in an emergency, for instruction, and so on.
- Speak in a tone that is easy on the ears; do not yell to be heard. Wait until the children are quiet and then speak in your normal tone; students will realize they have to be quiet to hear what you are saying.
- Have alternate activities planned for students who have been ill or for some reason cannot participate in physical education. Look into using sport magazines for children, workbooks, and similar resources.

Hints for Getting to Know Your School

- The principal really is your "pal." Don't think that your principal is too busy to help you with a discipline problem or concern; he or she hired you and wants to help you be the best teacher you can be. All principals want great teachers because it reflects positively on their school.
- Make education a team effort. Involve classroom teachers in developing curriculum, sharing ideas, and giving hints how to effectively handle problems with their homeroom.
- Get to know the secretaries. They are usually the first to deal with parents and are very eager to help you if you help them in a pinch. Get to know your janitor, who is invaluable when you need help finding a ladder or a pole long enough to reach that beanbag on top of the basketball goal.
- Become involved with the parent-teacher group; help out at after-school functions.

Probably the most important hint of all is to have fun yourself. Your enthusiasm will carry over to your students—making teaching enjoyable for you and them both!

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