

# Three Fundamental New Teacher Strategies

By The Editorial Team at Resilient Educator

Education degree programs and student teaching experience give teachers the knowledge and skills needed to get their first job. However, when it's time to enter a classroom for the first time as a professional, teachers should be ready for everything they didn't learn in tertiary . Here are strategies new teachers can use for a strong start in front of the class.

## New teacher strategy #1: Prepare

First-year teachers and those new to a school district may be required to go through an induction process, which can make teachers feel supported, and help them to provide an excellent education. Whether or not a school provides an induction program, however, new teachers can prepare for the school year in the following ways.

- Understand the families and community the school serves. Teachers should learn about and prepare for common challenges faced by students in their schools. For example, some children from underserved communities may need help with non-cognitive skills such as persistence and self control in order to succeed in school. Talking to administrators and doing independent research can provide insight into what will and won't work with students, and may uncover surprising resources.
- Check classroom readiness. New teachers should visit their classrooms before school starts and run down a list. Are there enough tables and chairs for the expected number of students as well as a teacher's desk? Does the overhead projector work? Is there chalk and/or are there new markers and erasers for the board? Teachers should make sure their classrooms are fully functional; if not, they should alert school staff and make sure problems are corrected.
- Learn safety procedures. Teachers should know all the safety and emergency procedures in their school, from fire drills to lockdowns. Kate Vlcek, a veteran teacher in Aurora, Colorado, warns that new teachers may not receive any hands-on training — just a faculty handbook. Teachers should review these procedures carefully and ask questions to make sure they understand.

# New teacher strategy #2: Organize

New teachers may be surprised by the many demands on their time once they enter the world of day-to-day teaching. Although first-time teachers may not fully understand what goes on behind the scenes in a successful classroom, getting organized in the following departments can help them as they learn.

- Lesson plans. Although new teachers will have written lesson plans in college, they should ensure that lesson plans are ready to go for the first quarter or semester. Each lesson plan should follow a clearly outlined path from beginning to end and include a dynamic objective, effective delivery method, learning activity, and evaluation of progress.
- Behavioral expectations. Kate Vlcek experienced very good results using the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) model to teach students how to succeed in her classroom. PBS sets clear expectations for students on behaving respectfully toward teachers and each other. It also focuses on the underlying causes of disruptive behavior and provides methods to intervene and prevent it. Some districts have implemented PBS training school-wide, but if they have not, teachers can use techniques such as functional assessment and pre-correction to keep students on-task and engaged. Teachers who have ground rules in place will help students feel comfortable in their classrooms.
- Classroom management tactics. On the first day of school, teachers should have guidelines in place for everyday classroom procedures such as answering questions in class, turning in and passing out papers, and visiting the drinking fountain, restroom or school nurse. The younger students are, the more guidance they will need on activities such as lining up for recess or sharpening pencils. Older students should receive instruction on respectful use of technology like computers, tablets or smartphones. Teachers who know what to do ahead of time in common classroom situations have one less thing to fret about on the first day of school.
- Assessment strategy. Because teachers in most school districts can choose how to evaluate their students' progress, this is another area where organization will pay off. New teachers should choose an assessment method for class participation, in-class assignments, and homework. Aside from the process of grading students' work, a system for student assessment must cover many bases, including grade logging, how much access parents have to teacher comments and feedback on their child's day-to-day performance, and any type of required state reporting.

# New teacher strategy #3: Engage

Once teachers are prepared and organized, they are ready to focus on the most important part of the job: students. It can be intimidating for new teachers when the time comes to put their training and plans into practice, but the following strategies can help.

- Set expectations. On the first day of school, teachers should introduce a short list of classroom rules (three to five) to students in an interactive way. The Teaching Channel's video on setting classroom expectations shows a teacher explaining his rules using visual aids, modeling, and questions and answers from the class. The teacher then invited students to make their own contribution to the classroom rules. Having students create something tangible on the first day is also very useful. If students leave their first class having accomplished a short piece of writing (like the list-making in the video), a problem-solving exercise, or a small art project, they are likely to look forward to the next session.
- Build community in the classroom. Simply standing by the door and greeting students informally as they enter can help a teacher set a positive classroom climate. Studies show that learning students' names as soon as possible is key to making them feel like a valued member of the class; teachers can try numerous techniques to learn students' names quickly. The first week of school should include activities that allow students to learn about each other as well.
- Get parents involved. Teachers must share the expectations they've set for their students with parents, and find a way to report back on the areas that need improvement as well as areas in which the child excels. Positive reports don't have to be just about academics. A parent who hears that their child is very good at listening or sharing has a reason to feel proud.
- Ask for help. New teachers should seek advice from other teachers and school administrators whenever they need it. Kate Vlcek said it's also important for first-time teachers to pace themselves: "Do not volunteer for *anything* until you're comfortable in your primary role as a teacher. Once you know what you're doing in the classroom, you can help with choir, recess, or sports."

New teachers should remember that the first day of school is new for everyone. Remaining flexible and having fun will help new teachers adjust to and enjoy their day-to-day lives as educators. In a few years, teachers can look back at their first day of school as an exciting and rewarding time.

