

POINTERS FROM PROS.

We asked some Virginia teachers with a little experience under their belts what advice they could offer new teachers, and here are some of their suggestions:

- > Make some time for you. The job will be overwhelming. Don't give up all your personal time to meet the impossible demands of the first year of teaching. Success in the classroom requires you to be happy, so be sure to do things to recharge your own batteries regularly. You'll find yourself with more energy and enthusiasm if you balance your time, and that translates into getting more done for your kids each day.
- > Build positive relationships with kids and parents, because that is what teaching is really all about. If you have a good working relationship with your students, they will work harder for you than if they don't see that you respect them. My kids will go to the wall for me, because they trust me. Keep a positive relationship with parents, co-workers and supervisors, too.
- > To forge a positive relationship with parents, call each one within the first two to four weeks of school and share a positive message about their child. If you start the year sharing how excited you are that little Tommy or Sally is so enthusiastic about learning, the parents will be more inclined to support you later in the year. The first call must be genuine praise, so look for anything you can turn into a positive. I do this every year, and it pays huge dividends when I have to call back with concerns about behavior or academic progress. Parents love to hear good things about their children, and by starting the year off positively, those parents will not cringe when they see a school number on caller ID.

Peter Pfothenhauer, Spotsylvania County



Sample Rules

Elementary Rules

- Be polite
- Let others work
- Raise hands to talk
- Work quietly

Middle School Rules

- Enter class quietly
- Raise hands to talk
- Work quietly
- Respect the rights of others

High School Rules

- Enter class quietly
- Raise hands to talk
- No putdowns
- Respect others

Jim Alberston, Chesterfield County

- > Be prepared in your content area. Always review stories, video and pictures you will use. Do not be afraid to say that you do not know the answer—but get back to the student ASAP with the information.
- > Take lots of classes in the summer. Go to lectures, join historical groups. Learn and meet the experts.
- > Do not get too down or too excited about the many situations that you will run across during a typical school year. There are too many factors you have no control over. Stay well-balanced!
- > Get involved as a coach or club sponsor. Let the students see you as a good role model in these situations.
- > Enjoy your free time away from school with your family and friends.

Amanda McCulla, Prince William County

- > Set expectations immediately. Make known from the start what expectations you have in the classroom, both for your students and for yourself. Then stick to those expectations!

Cammie Williams, NBCT, Roanoke County

- > Never underestimate the value of a well-controlled classroom. It doesn't mean being harsh; it means having an organizational method for seating, behavior and class work. Take time to teach this up front with each new activity you plan until your students get your routine.
- > Find a veteran teacher who will support you by listening and making suggestions. It should be someone from whom you feel comfortable accepting correction.
- > Try to look at student successes rather than your failures. Keep good messages from parents, observations, and cards from students in a place where you'll see them to give yourself a regular pick-me-up. Enjoy!

quieting the chit chat

One of the most common—and annoying—classroom management challenges is off-task chit-chat. Some tips for nipping it in the bud, drawn from an article by Kenneth Shore in the *Virginia Journal of Education*:

- > **Change the seating assignment.** Move the talkers away from their favorite audience.
- > **Pause or drop by.** Stop talking for a moment to give the chit-chatter a chance to quiet down, or continue talking yourself and move next to the offender.
- > **Signal or cue.** Teach students a signal or cue that you need quiet, such as when you flip the classroom lights off and on or sound a chime.
- > **Don't repeat.** The talkers ask (without a trace of irony), "What are we supposed to be doing?" just after you've finished giving the class directions. Don't repeat yourself—force the chatty one to find out another way.
- > **Provide a stage.** Give talkative students a chance to express themselves verbally when you deem it acceptable. Maybe the talker can lead the Pledge of Allegiance or give the morning announcements.

Elizabeth Wimmer, Stafford County

- > Befriend the custodians, cafeteria workers and office staff in your school. There will be many times when you need them!
- > Keep materials, files and everything else organized. Life has enough sources of unavoidable stress without adding the preventable kind, such as not being able to find your notes from a certain meeting.

Susan Ritter, Frederick County

- > Take excellent care of your health—exercise, eat well, sleep! I used Tai-chi the first year and it made a huge difference. Practicing a martial art is very good preparation for the classroom!
- > Don't let the students see your jaw fall open in response to their shocking behavior. That first year took me off-guard. I couldn't believe the language, the public displays of affection (outright lust) and the violence. I developed a "closed-mouth," non-emotional response to whatever extremes presented themselves. It defuses their behavior.
- > Make your "personal best" your goal, but realize that you are working with a lot of human beings and they will be very unpredictable. Throw in fire drills, flu season, fights and absenteeism and you have a lot of unpredictability to deal with. A well thought-out lesson plan is a great anchor, but you have to ride the waves. So loosen up, expect the unexpected, and go with the flow. Save perfection for your hobbies; it is a discouraging way to evaluate your teaching.

Jeff Weaver, Augusta County

- > Find someone in the building who is recognized as a strong teacher and pick his or her brain for good ideas.
- > Overplan your lessons. The longest part of the day is the time you did not plan for. And what you don't finish today, you can do tomorrow.■