

Welcome to Your First Year

In this document you will find helpful tips, tricks, and resources that might not be covered in your staff handbook or during your staff orientation. The resources on this site come from our experiences as first-year teachers, and we hope it will be a guide to surviving and thriving during **your** first year of teaching.

This project can be found at [Beyond the Handbook — Tips and Tricks](#), and was created in Spring 2018 as the culminating project of a group of students in the Educational Leadership program at University of Maine. Read more about the authors [here](#).

You can print this document off, or make a digital copy for your own records and add your own notes and annotations!

What's Coming Up?

A broad view of the year: Structures to remember.

August

- Get in your classroom! Meet staff: custodial, office, kitchen, and staff
- Setting up your classroom
 - Decide where supplies will be kept, choose a layout for your classroom, see “How to Handle Situations”
- Beginning of the year testing
 - Find your district’s testing schedule!
- “First 6 Weeks” teaching procedures
 - The first six weeks are packed with new faces, classroom expectations, and procedures that need to be taught over and over, fire drills, lock downs, procedures for lining up, hallway behavior
 - Here’s a book that might [help](#)!
- Get to know your students as people, see “How to Handle Situations”
- Be aware of the athletic schedules: games, practices, and early dismissals
- Learn student information system for attendance, health alerts, IEP/504 documents, student contact information, seating chart

September

- Get to know your grading system, begin entering grades

- Teach/Reinforce procedures (for example: lockdown, fire drill, etc.)
- Construct your professional goals for the year
- Check in with your Certification Mentor

October

- Know your holiday procedures for all major holidays
 - Examples: Costumes for Halloween? Parades? Winter holiday gifts and cards? Valentine's Day cards? Birthday parties and invitations? Treats and food policy?
- When do grades close? What are the expectations for grading? ASK!!
- Protocol for parent/teacher conferences (example: student led, student work, schedule of the conferences)

November

- Thanksgiving & Veteran's Day
- Thanksgiving week - don't plan major events (expect disruptions)
- Snow days/Early release/Late start - know the schedules, know the notification system
- Reorient yourself with extra curriculars, for instance, athletic schedules change, clubs and activities may shift

December

- Winter holidays - Take into account students with stressful home lives. This could look like withdrawal, sadness, increased acting out, etc.
- Wrap up units of study before break, end strong so you can start strong

January

- Be prepared to reinforce classroom expectations and deal with behaviors
- Reteach/Review expectations
- Mid-year testing - be aware of the schedule

February

- Wrap up units of study before break, end strong so you can start strong
- Be ready for students to miss extended school time due to family plans
- The week before vacation: Take into account students with stressful home lives. This could look like withdrawal, sadness, increased acting out, etc.
- Plan for larger unit of study because there is a large chunk of teaching time

March

- LONG month! Be prepared for more behaviors. Plan something fun and different?
- State testing - be aware of the schedule and read testing handbook
- Be encouraging! Students feel how you present it. Bring nutritious food for students' brains!
- Care for your and your students' mental health.

April

- More state testing
- Wrap up units of study before vacation, end strong so you can start strong
- The week before vacation: Take into account students with stressful home lives. This could look like withdrawal, sadness, increased acting out, etc.
- Reteach expectations
- Change in extracurricular schedule, for instance, athletic schedules change, clubs and activities may shift

May

- Check district calendar for end of year assessments (due dates)
- Some schools take more field trips - review procedures and fill out paperwork
- Interrupted schedule - be flexible
- End of year planning

June

- Make sure all paperwork is up to date in files
- Check in with your Certification Mentor
- Promotion/ Graduation/ Awards night
- Clean room
- CELEBRATE the good things and reflect and let go of the other stuff
- Be thinking about next year

What's on your plate?

A guide to keeping your classroom organized

What is an effective way to set up my classroom?

There are countless ways to set up your classroom. These are questions you should ask yourself before you begin: Are you planning to have students work in small groups? Do you want all the desks facing the front of the room? The way you set up your room will also be different depending on your grade level.

Not only is the physical set-up of your room important to decide, but the use of organizational tools is essential. The teacher's desk can turn into a bottomless abyss where all papers go missing if set on top. A way to avoid this is to have:

- A turn-in bin for student work
- A filing cabinet with student folders

Talk to your colleagues and take a peek in their classrooms for ideas!

It's about ORGANIZATION!!!

Teacher blogs are a great way to get ideas for organization and the physical layout of your classroom. Below are some popular links:

[The Brown Bag: Classroom Organization: Tips and Tricks](#)

[The Simply Organized Teacher](#)

[We Are Teachers: 15 Marvelous Classroom Organization Tips for Back-to-School](#)

[Miss Decarbo: How I Stay Organized: Weekly Lesson Planning Tips and Tricks](#)

How do I structure the day?

- Your school may have a schedule in place already
- Every aspect of your day needs to be listed on the daily schedule (even the 5 minute activities)
- Your teacher calendar should also include as much information as possible. You can't remember it all!!

Blogs are a great place to look to see how other teachers are setting up their days.

[The Cornerstone for Teachers: Ideas for Daily Class Schedules](#)

[The Cornerstone for Teachers: Teacher Daily Schedule Makeover](#)

[Top Dog Teacher: My \(Jam-Packed\) 2nd Grade Daily Schedule](#)

What do I put in my substitute binder?

Your substitute binder should be a magical document where anyone could step into your classroom and know what to do, and have everything they need to support your classroom for the day. A great tip is to make a Sub Plan template and write a handwritten “thank you” to the sub. A typical substitute binder should include:

- An introduction letter to the substitute
- Attendance and lunch count forms (and what to do with them)
- Seating charts
- A list of your classroom rules
- Emergency procedures (what to do if...there's a fire, lockdown, etc.)
- What your duties are, what day you have them, and how to perform them
- Your daily schedule including the time of day
- Your students' daily schedule
- Student health concerns
- Emergency sub plans
- “Go-to” students for subs
- “Go-to” staff members
- Necessary worksheets and materials for the day
- Logins and passwords
- Substitute feedback template: How did the day go?
- Detention/ office referral forms/ nurse

Of course when you have a planned absence or a sick day you can “feel coming”, you will create personalized sub plans to have ready for the next day. It is, however, so important to have emergency plans that are easily accessed in the event that you do not have the ability to make them last minute. Below are some links that may help give you ideas for your binder:

[NEA: A Substitute Teacher Folder Checklist](#)

[Scholastic: Your Substitute Teacher Folder Checklist](#)

[Wife Teacher Mommy: How to Create a Brilliant Substitute Binder](#)

[Look for ready made sub plans on:](#)

[PE teacher sub plans](#)

[PE sub plans](#)

How do I request a day off?

Every school is different when it comes to requesting a day off. Examples of these are:

- Filling out a form from the office
- ASEOP (Online requesting site)
- Employee Self Service

Knowing how to request a day off is something that may not be mentioned to you as you begin your first year at a new school, so make sure you speak up for yourself and ask the right person. A good place to start is to ask the secretary in the office or a colleague.

How do I understand “teacher talk”?

If you haven't yet noticed teachers use a lot of acronyms! Teacher talk can sometimes be challenging to interpret when you are still trying to learn what everything stands for. IEP, 504, IDEA, FAPE, SLO, OT, GT FBA, DOE, ELL, PLC, PBL--- the list goes on! Below are some links to help you familiarize yourselves with these terms and what they mean.

[Education.com: 23 Acronyms That Teachers Use](#)

[Frequently Used Acronyms in Education](#)

How do I prepare for an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meeting on a student?

You are going to be invited to meetings. Lots of them. The most frequent invitation you might get is to an IEP meeting. These are held annually, triannually, and whenever anyone associated with the student calls for one. Woot woot! ***You will be asked to present information!*** When all the eyes are on you, be prepared! Be sure to have your data. Here's a link to a sample template that you may need to modify to meet your school's specific testing. Always end on a positive note. Parents tend to hold onto the last thing mentioned by the teachers.

IEP Meeting Teacher Input Form

PLEASE BRING THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION, AS WELL AS WORK SAMPLES THAT DEMONSTRATE THE STUDENT'S STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES. BE AS SPECIFIC AS POSSIBLE.

Student Name:		Grade:	
----------------------	--	---------------	--

Student Strengths:			
Social Interactions:			
Executive Functioning/Habits for Success/Study Skills:			
Accommodations that work in the Classroom:			
Assessment Data: (Include Percentile Scores If Available)	NWEAs		
	MEAs		
	DRA		
	Lexile Scores	F&P:	

	AIMSWEB	MCAP- MCOMP- Maze- OR-
	Other Progress Monitoring Data	

Math		
Current Grade:	Standards:	Meeting: Partially Meeting:
	Class Performance:	Tests: Projects/Assignments: Observations:
English/Language Arts		
Current Grade:	Standards:	Meeting: Partially Meeting: Not Meeting:
	Class Performance:	Tests: Reading: Projects/Assignments: Reading: Observations: Writing (NJL) --
Science		

Current Grade: _____	Standards:	Meeting: Not Meeting:
	Class Performance:	Tests: Projects/Assignments: Observations:
Social Studies		
Current Grade: _____	Standards:	Meeting: Not Meeting:
	Class Performance:	Tests: Projects/Assignments: Observations:
Fine Arts/Health/PE		
Current Grade: _____	Standards:	Meeting: Not Meeting:
	Class Performance:	Tests: Projects/Assignments: Observations:

How do I prepare for parent-teacher conferences?

Parent-teacher conferences (PTC) are different in each school. When do you have them? How long are they? What do you need to say? This is a conversation to start early in the year because typically PTCs come up in the blink of an eye, in October/November. Be prepared to discuss:

- Topics being taught
- Academics
- Behaviors/Social Skills
- Grade-level expectations

[Student Self-Reflection Form For Conferences](#)

[Scholastic: Ten Tips for Productive Parent Conferences](#)

[NEA: Parent- Teacher Conferences](#)

Making Connections

Part of what makes schools such dynamic places is that they're full of people! People who have talents, strengths, challenges, special areas of expertise, and interests and passions outside of school. Though there's not a lot of time to connect with staff, it is an important thing to do. Here's why:

- To avoid feeling isolated
- To get insights into your new position
- To learn the highlights of policies and procedures
- To become familiar with the personalities in your building
- To make connections, network, and find your tribe

Who can help me with...?

Your building is full of human resources! There will always be someone who can help you, but how will you find out who those humans are? Every school has experts in certain areas that you wouldn't necessarily know from their job title. Over time you will discover who are the...

- informal historians in your building
- classroom management masters
- curriculum experts
- assessment gurus
- technology masters
- classroom design and organization pros
- people to give you feedback
- people to make you laugh

Where do you start, especially when you're new? We hope you have a formal mentor in your building to help you with some of this! In any case, here are some other important people to reach out to in your building when you need help. The following are necessary people in your work life, so keep on their good side!

- **Administrative Assistants/Secretaries**
- **Custodial Staff**

- **Team Leader or Department Head**
- **IT Staff**

Unspoken Norms

What is the real purpose of...?

Every school has unspoken norms, but finding out what they are and how they affect your experience as a new staff member isn't something you'll find in your handbook. You will need to ask other, more seasoned staff members, questions about:

- **Lunch** - Is it just to eat and socialize, or is it an informal place to discuss other issues? If you miss eating lunch with the group, will you miss important information on students, schedules, and curriculum?
- **Staff meetings** - Are they an opportunity for sharing and professional development or a platform for complaints? Is attendance mandatory? Are suggestions welcomed or is it best to sit quietly until the meeting is over?
- **Having conversations at work...**
 - In the beginning, talk less and listen more
 - Get to know the personalities and their roles (formal and informal)
 - Observe body language
 - Don't engage in gossip
 - Be mindful of what you say to whom

Stress Management

Teaching is a stressful job. Besides your own stress, all of your students, coworkers, parents and basically everyone you will encounter is also dealing with some level of stress. Some stress is healthy; it helps keep people on task and pushes them to higher expectations. However, what can you do when the stress level has shifted into the unhealthy, unhelpful realm?

First, you must keep in mind that **the toxic stress of others is not within your control**. Repeat these words to yourself until you believe in them wholeheartedly. [This](#) is an informative video that explains toxic stress and the brain's response to it.

There are strategies to support stressed students and to help you manage your own stress.

- Know your triggers and how you respond
- Get to know your students
- Remain calm so your higher mind can function
- Find humor
- Learn about ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences) from the [CDC](#) or from this informative [site](#).

Next, you need to understand where your stress comes from and how to handle it. There are two main causes of a teacher's stress: students and everything else.

Students

Students are the reason we are here, and they are a joy. They can also present us with certain challenges. Undoubtedly students will test the limits with a new teacher. They will want to know what they can 'get away with.' In addition to the expected limit testing and boundary pushing, many of your students are living with toxic stress — you may want to watch the video that explains toxic stress again — which affects their school performance and behavior: *mainly self-regulation and the ability to form positive relationships*. It is not possible or appropriate for you to know all [the](#) details of every student's personal situation, but you can learn strategies to support students and to keep yourself calm as you predict, head off and diffuse tense situations.

Everything Else

In addition to students, you have an enormous amount of other responsibilities: planning and instruction, assessment, record-keeping, professional development, building duties and procedures, policy to understand, staff dynamics, extra and co-curricular responsibilities, expectations from administration, committee work, state mandates, meetings, etc. Your planning period will be chewed up pretty quickly, so it is important to set boundaries and know your limits to avoid adding to your own stress levels.

This [two-minute video](#) addresses teacher stress.

To avoid getting overwhelmed:

- Learn to say no and mean it
- Ruthlessly prioritize
- Set a schedule
- Remember to ask for help
- Don't beat yourself up when you forget to do any of the above suggestions — you're only human-like everyone else!

One more [great \(and short\) video](#) on this topic!

Self-Reflection

How do I know it's working? Are they learning? How do I know everyone's needs are being addressed?

These questions are the ones that might keep us up at night. Some days we know we miss the mark with our students: a lesson flops or veers off the rails, behaviors were a distraction, or the students just didn't get it. Not every lesson will be perfect and that's OK! What *is* important is that we're learning from what doesn't work. If you have a terrible lesson, ask someone who is more experienced for feedback. Here are some ideas to cultivate a reflective teaching practice:

- **Find a friend** - Have a conversation with a trusted colleague with whom you can be totally honest. The goal is for this conversation to offer you new perspective on your own practice.
- **Observe a colleague** - Classroom observations are a great tool for self-reflection. It's amazing to watch an experienced colleague in action because you'll see how they do things differently than you.
- **Observe yourself** - Yikes! It's scary but true. Videotaping is a powerful tool to learn about your own teaching.
- **Ask your students for feedback** - Design a form for written feedback or just have an open discussion. You can learn as much from your students as they will learn from you.
- **Keep a journal** - If writing is a good way for you to process, start a teaching journal!

[Practical Tips for Cultivating a Learning Relationship with Students](#) (J. Orlando/Faculty Focus) - feedback from students

[Fostering Reflection](#) (L. Danielson/Educational Leadership) - various methods, with sources

[The Importance of Reflection](#) (T. Sanders/ United Federation of Teachers) - dialogue with a colleague

[Five Reasons Why You Should Seek Your Own Student Feedback](#) (J. Gonzalez, Cult of Pedagogy)

How to Handle Situations Creating Classroom Culture



Routines that will stand the test of time!

As a new teacher it is important for you to start your year with a set of clear routines and expectations. Establishing classroom norms together help generate “buy-in”, and will be the foundation of your classroom culture.

[Clear routines](#): Rules, Routines, and Standards in Elementary and Secondary Grades

- [32 Classroom routines](#) every teacher needs
 - [“First 6 Weeks”](#) teaching procedures, here’s a book that might help!
 - Some Ideas for setting up your [room](#)
 - [Video](#) for routines and procedures
 - [Video](#) showing clapping hands to redirect students
 - [Video](#) to help calm the class and refocus
-
- As a teacher, in Maine, you are a [mandated reporter](#). This means that if you know or have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is or is likely to be abused or neglected you must make a make a report to DHHS.
 - Parent teacher conferences: What is my role, and how do I prepare?
Ask a colleague or mentor for guidance.
 - Never throw away paper that has private information (student names, grades, addresses, or the like) about staff or students; always shred them.
 - Clear expectations
[Student expectations](#) for beginning teachers

Student Routines and Procedures for the Classroom

Questions to consider while you are creating your classroom routines and procedures.

1. How do you want students to enter the classroom?
2. How you want to get students attention? (lights off, bell as a signal, clap, etc.)
3. Do you want to line students up to leave the room?
4. How you want them to communicate during class? (hands in the air)
5. How will you transition students from one activity to the next?
6. When do you allow students to go to the bathroom, get a drink, sign in and out of the classroom?
7. What quality of work are you expecting? How would you communicate that with the student?
8. How will you create classroom rules? Who decides what the rules are?
9. When do you send students out of the room or to the office for behavior?
10. If you have to step out of the room for a minute, who will supervise your class?

Common Student Expectations for the Classroom

Examples you might want to use in your classroom. Be explicit with examples.

1. Follow classroom rules.
 2. Be on time.
 3. Be prepared for class.
 4. Be considerate and respectful.
 5. Show respect for school property and students.
 6. Hand in assignments on time.
 7. Wait to be dismissed.
 8. Use an inside voice.
- Don't be intimidated to ask questions to veteran staff; everyone knows you will have questions. Veteran staff members should be more than willing to help you find things, share experiences, talk about grading, discuss boundaries, etc.
 - Culture and Climate
If you are worried about culture and climate in your classroom or school, the following websites will provide you with their recommendations.
PBIS or [Positive Behavior Intervention System](#) & [Responsive Classroom](#)



Create a Caring Classroom Community

1. Need to make norms, connections and expectations. For example:
 - Treat others as you would like to be treated.
 - Respect other people and their property (e.g., no hitting, no stealing).
 - Laugh with anyone, but laugh at no one.
 - Be responsible for your own learning.
 - Come to class and hand in assignments on time.
 - Do not disturb people who are working.

2. Understand the language used in class, common words understood by all.
 - [Shared language](#)
 - Thumbs up, to the side and down
 - How do you want to make decisions in class, vote fist to 5
 - If you see students are squirmy in their seats, take the time to get the wiggles out, stretch, breath, whatever it takes to get them back on track to focus in your classroom.

3. Get to know each other, team building & modeling appropriate behaviors.
 - [Video](#): getting to know your kids using Wordle
 - [Video](#): Icebreakers ages 6-12
 - [Video](#): Icebreakers for middle or high school students
 - Team building [activities](#)

4. Be Respectful, Responsible and Safe
 - Model
 - Teach them what respect is
 - Teach them how you should be responsible
 - What does safe look like?
5. Allow for individuality (recognize our differences and similarities)



Connecting with the Community!

1. Survey parents/students what are the likes and needs of our community?
 - Survey Monkey
 - Google Forms
 - Weebly
2. Ask questions about the community with staff and students.
 - Survey Monkey
 - Google Forms
 - Email
 - Google Hangout
 - Google Classroom
3. Visit neighborhoods, restaurants, etc.
 - Go eat at restaurants, coffee shops
 - Drive through the neighborhoods to see where your students live
 - Attend functions if possible in the neighborhoods like parades, events, fundraisers, etc.
4. Attend athletic events, games, concerts, & plays.

5. Attend parent/IEP/504 meetings, school board meetings, town meetings, etc.
 - It is important to attend a couple of extra curricular events to show students you are invested in their lives beyond the classroom.
 - It's all about relationships; build these and they will invest in you.
 - Attend concerts & plays to show your support.
 - You don't have to attend all school board or town meetings, but going to a couple will give you a sense of how the district works.
 - If you have questions about how an IEP/504 meetings run, make sure you talk to your special education teacher. Usually they provide a worksheet to guide your preparation.

Technology Tools and Tips

Why do I have my device(s)?

The school device(s) (laptop, tablet, combination of both) issued to you are funded through the Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI) grant. MLTI was the first 1:1 program in the country and is still the nation's largest program of its kind. The goal of the grant is to provide you and your students with compatible technology to increase the number of learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom.

The device(s) are meant to play a significant role in both your planning and instruction. They are preloaded with software the state and district have identified as solid foundational tools for your use in the classroom. If you would like additional software on your device, please contact the school or district IT director for further instructions.

What should I do with it?

For school assigned tasks like grading, attendance, and incident reporting, all teachers are expected to use their device as outlined in the staff handbook (or whatever else your district uses). Beyond the mandatory tasks, all teachers will use their device(s) differently. You are given the flexibility to use your device(s) as a tool to create relevant and engaging content for your students.

Examples of how MLTI devices are being used...

- Student created video projects
- Comic strips
- Instructional manuals for student projects
- Educational games
- Student created public service announcements
- Graphic arts
- Composing music
- Sharing papers with peers and teachers for comments and edits
- Assessments
- Reading and math programs
- Podcast creation
- Collaboration space
- Self paced learning

Personal Use on State/School Issued Devices

Always Remember...

- The device belongs to the school
- Expectations of privacy should be kept to a minimum
- Your First Amendment Rights are limited on a school issued device
- Your school is required to adopt and implement an internet safety policy.

[Read the Children's Internet Protection Act \(CIPA\) here](#)

Do Not...

- Violate copyright and trademark laws
- Attempt to access unauthorized websites (obscene, pornographic, sexually explicit, or harmful to minors)
- Solicit funds for profit or non-profit organizations unless given prior approval
- Communicate on behalf of non-school related organizations
- Communicate political views

Social Media

- The power of social media cannot be denied. However, communicating with students using personal social media accounts can lead to compromising

situations. If you prefer to communicate with students and parents using social media platforms, it is highly recommended that you create professional/school accounts. It is also recommended to communicate with administration and the technology staff before adding, following, or communicating with students or parents.

- You must have written parental permission to post any picture with/of a student to personal social media accounts. The school's media release(s) does not cover personal accounts.
- We recommend waiting until students have graduated before adding or following them on social media.
- Pressing "like" on a post is considered speech.
- Privacy settings are not guaranteed to keep your information away from students and parents.

How do I get help with my device?

Most issues with your device can be solved by conducting a simple Google or Youtube search. If you are unsuccessful, please speak with _____ (list of tech savvy teachers). If you are still unsuccessful, contact the IT department for assistance at (ext...)

Free Technology Resources

Learning Technology

- Common Sense Education - www.commonsense.org
 - Great site for professional development and curriculum. The video library is a great resource for both beginning and veteran teachers
- Hour of Code- <https://hourofcode.com/us>
 - Website to help student learn basic coding skills in game form

Digital Tools

- Weebly - <https://www.weebly.com/>
 - Tool to create free websites
- Twiddla - www.twiddla.com
 - Online whiteboard for teachers and students

Free Media

- Pixabay- <https://pixabay.com/>
 - Site with hundreds of royalty free images
- Photos for Class - [Photosforclass.com](https://photosforclass.com)
 - Appropriate images for school use
- BenSound - www.bensound.com/royalty-free-music
 - Site with hundreds of royalty free music and sounds
- Hippocampus.com
 - Collection of videos from leading online education providers (Khan Academy, NROC Project, etc.)

Assessment Tools

- Abc Mouse - <https://www.abcmouse.com/>
 - Lessons and games
 - Teacher must create student login accounts
- Easy CBM - <https://app.easycbm.com/>
 - Reading assessment program

Research Tools

- Marvel! - <http://libraries.maine.edu/mainedatabases/>
 - Maine Virtual Library. Great tool for student to use for research in allows for free access to educational databases (ebsoco, proquest) at school. For use outside of school, you will need to create an account

App Exploration

- Apple Educator Representatives
 - Speak to your administration or technology coordinators if you are interested in having an apple educator come into your classroom to assist with using more Apple resources effectively
- ALA Best Apps for Teaching and Learning List
<http://www.ala.org/aasl/standards/best/apps/2017>

Other

- Skype in the Classroom
 - Talk with teachers and students from around the world. Have class discussions and presentations using a global platform