Preparing the Classroom Community for Its Citizens

"By failing to prepare you are preparing to fail."
~Benjamin Franklin

Since the first days of school are the most important days, it is imperative to be as prepared as possible to ensure a smooth and structured beginning. Part of guaranteeing a successful start to the school year is taking the time to prepare your classroom.

> "...Studies have shown that effective teachers had the classroom ready. They prevented problems by implementing a plan at the beginning of the school year. This plan:
>
> - Used time as effectively as possible
> - Implemented group strategies with high levels of involvement and low levels of misbehavior
> - Choose lesson formats and academic tasks conducive to high student involvement
> - Communicated clear procedures of participation
>
> Because effective teachers had the classroom ready, they were able to prevent many misbehaviors from occurring. The reason effective teachers are effective is that they have far fewer student problems and hence are able to get their students to work and to achieve. Consequently, effective teachers **incur far less stress in having to deal with behavior problems and are able to leave each day feeling happy, accomplished, and proud**."
> *~The First Days of School, Harry Wong & Rosemary Wong*

Preparation involves the physical space of the classroom, all of the items held within the classroom, the structures and procedures you will use to organize your classroom, the curriculum you will teach, and yourself. The more you can consider and plan before school begins, the better off you will be.

While preparing for your students' arrival, consider...

- How will you **arrange the room** for maximum student learning, ensuring it is organized and welcoming?
    - o Do not over-decorate or clutter your room.
    - o Fresh paper on all bulletin boards, leaving some blank for student work.
    - o Post expectations, procedures, and other pertinent information.
    - o Determine a space for posting assignments (i.e. projected or written at front of room)
    - o How many desks/chairs do you need? Get rid of any extra furniture that will not be useful.
    - o How can you arrange furniture for easy movement around the room (even once there are 30+ bodies there)?
    - o All desks should face the teacher initially; do not begin the year with students in groups.
    - o Place your desk where you can easily monitor students.
    - o Where will students store their personal items? (coats, bags, binders, books, lost-and-found, etc.) Where will you store your personal items?
    - o Use bins, boxes, trays, etc. to store classroom materials/supplies in an organized and easily accessible fashion.
    - o If setting up work areas (i.e. computer station or reading corner) ensure easy access and monitoring. Ensure all items are functioning.

- What **supplies** do you need in your classroom and how will they be organized?
  - What items will you allow students to use? What items are for your use only? (If you don't want students touching a particular item, don't have it in a visible and accessible place.)
  - Only keep the supplies that are used often out in the room; pack others away.
  - Use plastic bins, buckets, baskets, folders, etc. for organization
  - Consider making multiple supply bins for multiple group use; attach the procedure for proper use of supplies to the bin
  - Have emergency supplies on hand (Band-Aids, hygiene products or toiletries that students may need in an emergency, snack items – such as breakfast bars or crackers for emergencies, etc.)
  - Keep a supply of snacks, water, and frozen meals at school for yourself– a hungry teacher is a grumpy teacher!
- What **procedures** do your students need to learn? How will you teach them?
  - See "Establishing and Teaching Procedures"
- What are your **expectations** for student behavior? How will you give them input on these expectations to ensure **ownership**?
  - See the "Ideal Classroom Community Member"

- What **policies** will you implement?
  - Familiarize yourself with school wide policies to ensure you don't contradict these in your classroom policies.
  - If teaching on a team, consult with other teachers and try to make team-wide policies.
  - Consider policies for homework (missed, late, points docked, etc.), being tardy, hall behavior, etc.
  - Determine your discipline plan/consequences
  - Copy all needed forms (i.e. tardy slips, hall passes, attendance, referral forms, etc.) and have them in an easily accessible place.
- What **administrative tasks** will need to be accomplished during the beginning of the school year? How will you work with administration and fellow teachers to ensure these tasks will not disrupt your class time, especially during the first days of school when every minute is critical for establishing class expectations, procedures, and community culture?
  - Assigning locks/lockers
  - Assigning books
  - Schedule changes
  - Collecting student forms, fees, etc.
- How will you **introduce yourself** to families and students before school begins?
  - Send a letter home introducing yourself, your classroom philosophy, and your excitement for the course.
- How will you **welcome** students on the first day?
  - Have an organized, clean room.
  - Display your name, room number, subject, etc. outside your door and on the board.
  - Smile
  - Greet all students individually (see "Say Hey Your Way")
- What will you cover on the most important **first days of school**? (See "The First Day of School – Sample Lesson Plan")
  - Welcome script
  - Syllabus/course overview
  - Introduction to expectations and procedures – teach expectations and procedures before curriculum!
  - Have necessary supplies/materials ready to go prior to student arrival
- How will you ensure students **get to work immediately**, as soon as they enter your classroom?
  - Assignment always found in the same place that students get and start immediately, such as a warm-up or journal entry relating to the day's lesson or character education

- o Do you need a timer? (egg timer, Power Point count-down slide, alarm, etc.)
  - o Opening assignments may be based in character education rather than specific to course
- How will you take **attendance**?
  - o Do NOT waste ANY class time taking roll verbally. Choose a more productive and organized way to do this. For example:
    - ■ Create a map of the classroom with each student's name noted where their desk is on the paper. As students work on their opening assignment/warm-up, note any empty desks and mark this on the paper. Transfer this information to an attendance sheet at a convenient time.
    - ■ Ask a responsible student to take attendance for you. Give him/her a list of class members and have him/her mark who is absent for you.
- How will you have seats pre-assigned (**seating chart**)?
  - o Label student names on desks.
  - o Let students know up front their seat may change.
  - o Perhaps speak to previous year's teachers when possible to determine if certain students should not be seated together
- How will you learn students' **names**?
  - o Seating chart.
  - o Have students make name tents that they sit on their desks.
  - o Allow students the opportunity to learn one another's names also. (see the activities under the Community Building section of this notebook)
- How will you determine students' **grades**?
  - o Policy for late or incomplete work
- How will you encourage students to keep their **class materials organized**?
  - o 3 ring binder
  - o Spiral notebook that everything is glued into
  - o Table of contents in front of notebook containing columns for the date, the item, the page number, and the grade. Students log each item (notes, worksheets, graded assignments, etc.), put a page number on it, and keep it in binder or notebook in order.
  - o Book bag/locker organization tips
- How will you encourage your students keep track of assignment **due dates** (homework, long-term projects, tests, quizzes, etc.)
  - o Students purchase a daily planner for writing in their assignments, due dates, commitments, etc.
  - o Post a calendar in the classroom that notes due dates
- How will you ensure students who were **absent** get the information and work they missed?
  - o Staple a folder by the classroom assignment calendar; place worksheets, copies of notes, or other materials needed in the folder; teach students during the beginning of the year that students are responsible for checking the calendar and picking up their missed work in the folder.
  - o Assign a learning buddy for each student; when a buddy is absent, the present student takes an extra worksheet, etc.; students check in with their buddy upon return for missed work
  - o How long will students have to complete work missed while absent?
- How will you maintain **contact with parents/guardians**?
  - o Preferred method of being contacted and contacting parent/guardians (phone or e-mail)
  - o Weekly (or more/less often) news letter or e-alert
  - o Open door policy or particular hours of availability
  - o Parent/teacher conferences
  - o Student lead conferences
  - o Open houses
- How will you handle **interruptions**?
  - o Speak to your colleagues before school begins and consider all of the things that may come up on the first day. (This generally involves students finding they are in the wrong classroom, needing to change schedules, etc.) Talk about how you can address these issues without interrupting one another's class.

- o Speak to students about interruptions (i.e. they need to interrupt your class after leaving a book or personal item behind; another teacher has sent them to you with a memo; etc.)
  - o Announcements, altered schedules, etc.
- How will you **prepare yourself** to have a wonderful first day, week, month, and year?

Notes/considerations for your specific school and classroom situation: