

Building Effective Classrooms in Kindergarten Tips from 2nd Year Teachers & Mentors



(1) Be Prepared and Proactive

SUMMER POSTCARDS

- Get a class list with mailing address and phone numbers. You can send students and parents a post card in August introducing yourself to them, include what you've done over the summer, how much you are looking forward to meeting them and what they should bring with them the first day of school

VISUALIZE YOUR CLASSROOM

- Design an environment that is comfortable for you; i.e. ensures a good view of students, encourages comfortable flow, access to materials, ensures safety
- Things to include/consider:
 - group space (i.e. carpet, rocking chair, chart paper easel)
 - teacher space – do you need one?
 - centres (use some or all of the following) – drama/house, blocks, bin toys, sand, water, art & crafts, painting, sensory, writing (language), math, themes, science
 - snack table or group snack
 - where will children keep their things? Label cubbies alphabetically
- Visual appeal
 - Bulletin boards – colourful
 - Changeability
 - How to use? (i.e. word walls, student work display)
 - Print rich (using names a lot, labeling things)
- Organizing AM/PM classes
 - Color coding (e.g. AM is red, PM is blue)
 - Separate baskets for each class
- Consider having something representing each student up in your classroom. Having their name on the door is a great way to welcome them and make them feel like they belong to the classroom

- Make sure you have a central meeting area with a rug, rocking chair and a writing surface available.

BEFORE SCHOOL STARTS

- Introduce yourself to the secretary and the caretaker. If they are your best friends you will find life to be much easier.
- Find out when you are able to enter the school in August. This is an exciting time to set up your room. Bring your mom or a good friend to help you out. During this time go around and introduce yourself to other teachers, as they can be very helpful. Change the fadeless paper on your bulletin boards, set up seats and tables, and organize materials (paper, markers, etc.)
- Approach your principal and ask if you can have a mentor (this person will be your fundamental support system). It is often helpful to have someone who teaches the same grade as you, however; if you ‘click’ with someone else it will still work. It is most important to have a mentor you are comfortable with.
- Learn your student’s names - there is nothing sweeter than hearing your own name and students will react positively.
- Make sure you have all materials as far as teacher guides, curriculum documents, etc.
- Access TEL (similar to First Class) and make sure you get someone to teach you how to use it.
- Ask questions, all teachers have been in your position, they know how you feel.

PARENT COMMUNICATION

- Consider sending a letter home in August to inform Juniors of their start day and welcoming returning seniors
- Consider sending a letter on the first Friday of the year, explaining routines (i.e. lining up, borrow a book, snack routines, library days, gym days and appropriate dress)
- Consider sending a September Newsletter welcoming students and introducing yourself
- Consider a weekly newsletter written with the students
- Consider sending home a monthly calendar (before the start of a new month) to inform of special events, children’s birthdays, special classes



(2) Establishing Classroom Rules and Routines

FIRST DAY TIPS

- Entry routines
 - Go outside 10 – 15 minutes before bell and greet students and parents
 - Explain to parents that pick up time is _____
 - Use a class list to record who is picking up each student
 - Use a class list to record most recent phone number
 - Teach line up routine, showing students where line up

- Do you have staggered entry? (discuss with principal – what is the latest day for all students to arrive)

- Will parents stay? (consider asking parents to leave as parents can exacerbate tears)

- Do you have an assistant to help manage new students? If so, ask assistant to deal with criers

- Where will students put their things? Have you labeled the cubbies previously or will you wait until the end of the first week?

- Where do students go upon arrival? (i.e. find a book on the carpet)

- What is your first lesson? (i.e. introduce yourself, sing a song, read a story, summer sharing circle) ****limit time on carpet – build gradually****

- Explain rules and routines by doing a walk around as a whole class or small groups
 - BE VERY SPECIFIC! (i.e. demonstrate flushing toilet)
 - DEMONSTRATE/MODEL
 - NEVER ASSUME that they know

- Some Beginning Centres We Suggest (you don't have to open them all the first week!!) a couple of puzzles, books, colouring, sand/water(not side by side) tub toys (LEGO), computers, playdough, House centre(limit amount of props)

- Establish routines for how the children are going to choose their activities (velcro name cards, bracelets, activity board with pockets, planning sheets for later in the year)

- What centres are open?
 - Include demonstrations of centre rules in walk around
 - How do children choose centres? How are participants limited at a centre (i.e. # of happy faces dictates number of children allowed, # of color coded necklaces dictates number of children allowed)

- What activities are most welcoming? (i.e. playdough & water are calming activities)
- What if children have difficulty deciding on an activity? How will you direct them?
- Tidy up transition
 - Teach tidy up signal before the children play (i.e. turning off lights, “Everybody stop, hands on top”)
 - Practice signal with students
- Carpet time again
 - What will you do? (i.e. read a story, sing a song, simple game)
- Is it a good idea to take them outside? (consider that you’ve just learned their faces, keep track of numbers of students)
- Dismissal routines
 - How much time will you need? (consider lots of time to teach routines)
 - How will you monitor student dismissal?
 - Who is allowed to pick up students? (You need to get to know caregivers!)
 - Will parents pick up the students at the classroom door or at a main entrance?
 - How do you ensure each child is accounted for? (i.e. “Hand to Hand” – take child’s hand and place in parents) SAFETY IS IMPORTANT!

FIRST WEEK TIPS

- Don’t overload your expectations
- CURRICULUM CAN WAIT!
- Start building routines immediately (i.e. entry routines, tidy up routines, calendar routines, listening routines)
- Create a signal to get student attention
- What are the rules? Reinforce what works for you (can they go to the bathroom during lesson time? How do they have to sit during lessons?)
- How do students communicate how they need to go to bathroom? (make a W with fingers to communicate silently)
- Consistency is important

FOSTERING INDEPENDENCE

- Students are capable of much more than we might give them credit for
- How can you alleviate your workload?
 - Teach them early on how to do things for themselves or for each other
 - Ask 3 other kids before you ask the teacher
 - Have a student job board (i.e. attendance, student helper, chair helper, lights person)

- Have a place basket for completed work, have a basket for notes/money/things from home – students can learn to monitor these things themselves
- When can kids interrupt? How do you communicate that you are busy? (e.g., wear a hat that communicates that you are not to be interrupted)
- Stop/Go sign on the bathroom door that tells students the bathroom is busy – then they don't have to ask you to check for them
- Teaching centre rules allows students to make choices independently
- Create a list of what students can do (i.e. a list of who can tie shoes) so students can ask each other for help
- Have a lot of choices in your classroom to allow students to remain busy in a valuable way and to avoid wandering
- Pair Senior kids with Junior kids as helpers and teachers (i.e. teaching how to walk down the hall properly, how to teach routines)

(3) Inclusion Building Activities (First Day/First Week/First Month)

If you establish a healthy classroom community, classroom management will fall into place naturally.

Positive Classroom Environment

- Use positive statements
- Make your classroom feel like home
- Give students opportunities for success
- Focus on the kids who are following/ showing what you expect
- Use a “soft” voice
- Establish rules together
- Be generous with all students (make sure students have their needs met so they can focus on learning: i.e. don't make a big deal about students who lose their pencils, etc.)
- Provide students opportunity to “lead” the class and be active in daily activities (teacher-for-the-day, reading and writing morning messages, job board monitors, jig saw games, think-pair-share, allow students to sit in a “Special” chair)

