

Back to School **Teacher Tips**



A Union of Professionals
AFT Teachers

The American Federation of Teachers is a leader in providing teachers the resources they need to help them succeed.

AFT's Educational Research and Dissemination (ER&D) program presents proven research-based strategies on teaching and learning. This brochure presents material from ER&D's *Foundations of Effective Teaching* course and includes tips for teachers as they start a new school year.



Back to School Teacher Tips

Welcome back to school! The beginning of a new year is a crucial time for students and teachers alike. What you do to establish an effective classroom management system and create an environment that supports learning will influence what your students accomplish throughout the year.

Everyone knows that learning cannot take place in chaos. We also know that well-managed classrooms don't just happen. They are the result of teachers' careful planning before the year begins and their deliberate implementation of the plan on the first day of school and thereafter.

Today there is a solid research base that identifies the practices of effective classroom managers at the beginning of the year. Studies have consistently found that the most successful teachers:

- arrange and organize their classrooms to support instructional goals;
- establish procedures for conducting routine activities and rules to govern student behavior;
- teach rules and procedures as they would any new content area; and
- actively monitor students and consistently apply appropriate consequences.

While these findings validate many of the things good teachers do intuitively, the research also offers some new ideas and approaches. This guide summarizes the consistent findings from classroom management research conducted over the past 25 years. It is designed to help you and your students get off to a good start and have a productive school year.

Establishing a Management System

Good classroom management is the result of a three-stage process:

1. *Before the year begins*—planning and preparation;
2. *During the first days of school*—deliberate introduction and reinforcement of expectations; and
3. *Throughout the year*—maintaining cooperation through consistency and effective instruction.

Stage 1: **Before the Year Begins**

Arranging Your Classroom

Good teachers know that the physical environment of the classroom can either enhance or hinder learning.

Appropriate room preparation and arrangement of materials conserve class time for learning, while inadequate planning interferes with instruction by causing interruptions and delays.

An effective room arrangement is also essential to classroom management because it eliminates possible distractions and minimizes opportunities for students to disrupt others.

When arranging student desks or tables, keep in mind potential distractions, such as windows and doors, small group work areas, or your desk. Leave enough room around student desks so that you can easily reach each person when monitoring or giving help. Plan to seat students who will need extra attention close to the area where you spend most of your time.

At the beginning of the year, consider arranging students' desks in rows facing the major instructional area. This will allow you to deliver instructions to the whole

Keys to Good Classroom Design

- Ensure an easy flow of traffic throughout the room and keep high traffic areas, such as those near the teacher's desk, pencil sharpener, and wastebasket, free from congestion.
- Make sure you have a clear view of all students at all times.
- Ensure that students can easily see instructional displays and presentations.
- Make storage space and materials readily accessible.

class, monitor student behavior more readily, and become familiar with each student's work habits. Once you have established your management system, you may want to move desks into clusters or other flexible groupings.

Remember that your classroom is the learning environment for both you and your students. Research shows that effective managers take stock of their rooms and the characteristics of their students and develop a room plan that meets their instructional, behavioral, and organizational needs.

Procedures and Rules

Before the year begins, effective classroom managers carefully consider how they want their classrooms to function and the way they want their students to behave. Good managers think through what procedures students need to know in order to perform specific activities, and they establish classroom rules that clearly articulate their expectations for behavior.

Procedures tell students how to perform routine instructional and housekeeping tasks.

A smooth-running classroom requires as many as 30 to 60 procedures. Examples of such routines include:

- getting the teacher’s attention;
- using the pencil sharpener, bathroom, or drinking fountain;
- moving within and outside the classroom;
- lining up;
- storing personal belongings;
- using learning centers; and
- taking down and turning in assignments.

You should introduce procedures to students over a period of time, as needed. Sometimes it’s necessary to modify procedures during the school year to adapt to changes in instruction or the needs of a particular class.

Rules tell students how they are expected to behave.

Rules apply to areas such as classroom interactions, respect for others and their property, and participation in class. Effective managers establish only three to six “umbrella” rules that remain consistent throughout the

Example of Classroom Rules

- Be Prompt
- Be Prepared
- Be Polite
- Be Productive

year. Most rules are stated positively and are written in broad, general terms that require further thought and interpretation.

Rules should be prominently posted in the classroom and should be introduced on the first day of school.

Reinforcing Your Expectations

Good teachers know that a positive classroom climate supports student learning. They create such an environment by communicating high expectations and standards, conveying confidence in students' abilities, and praising good performance. These teachers provide incentives, rewards, and recognition to highlight appropriate behavior.

At the same time, however, effective managers must consider how they will respond when students misbehave. They create a system of fair and appropriate consequences to use when students do not cooperate.

Consequences are sanctions applied when students behave inappropriately.

Think of these interventions as a “hierarchy of consequences” that includes a range of sanctions, with each step increasing in seriousness in relation to the offense. It's particularly important to develop a range of minor interventions you can use without interrupting the instructional flow of the class.

Such a system of consequences might include the following:

Minor Interventions

- Use nonverbal cues, such as looking directly at the student, frowning, or using a hand signal.
- Move closer to the student.

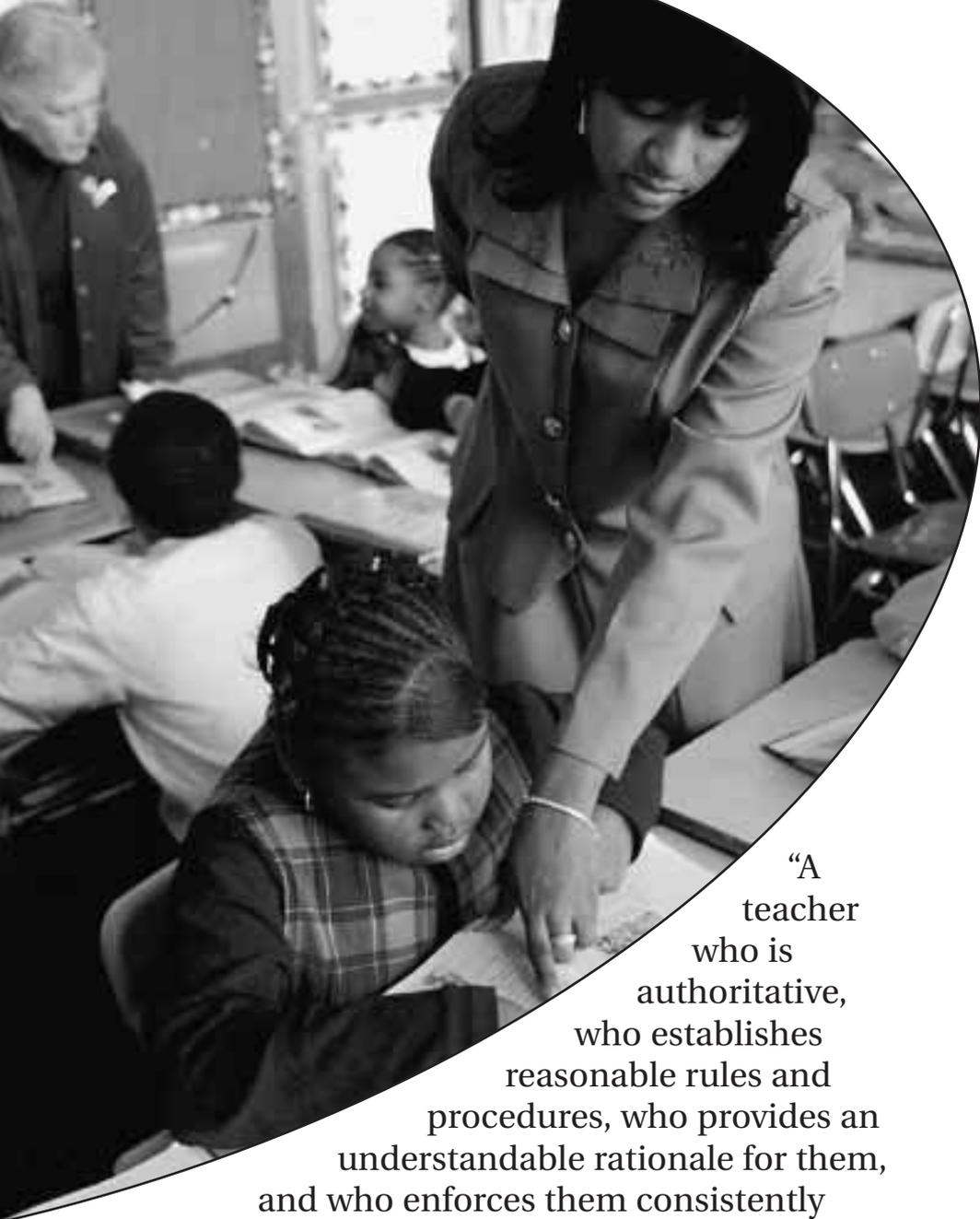
- Direct a question to the student, using his or her name.
- Redirect the student to the task or activity.
- Remind the student of the rule or procedure not being followed.
- Have the student state the rule or procedure that applies and explain the behavior that would have been more appropriate.
- Tell the student, in a calm but authoritative tone, to stop the behavior.
- Move the student to another seat.

Moderate Interventions

- Have the student stay after class for a conference.
- Withhold a privilege or assign a penalty.
- Isolate the student in another part of the room.
- Send the student to a time-out area.
- Contact the student's parents to discuss the misbehavior.
- Assign after-school detention.
- Write a behavior contract.

Serious Interventions

- Remove the student from the class, following the school's disciplinary procedures.
- Schedule a formal parent conference to identify mutually agreed-upon interventions.
- Recommend that the student be suspended from class for a specified period of time.



“A teacher who is authoritative, who establishes reasonable rules and procedures, who provides an understandable rationale for them, and who enforces them consistently will find the great majority of students willing to abide by them.”

—CAROLYN EVERTSON
Vanderbilt University

Stage 2:

At the Beginning of the Year

Effective managers take deliberate actions during the first few days of school to create a productive classroom learning environment. They assume leadership of their classes immediately, make clear their expectations for students, and plan activities that will ensure high levels of teacher-student interaction.

First Day of School

The first day of the new school year is a critical one for teachers. With careful planning, you will create a good first impression and be prepared to handle unexpected events. Here are some tips as you plan for the first day of school.

- **Greet students at the door and direct them to their seats.**

This simple act ensures that students enter the classroom in an orderly fashion and allows you to make immediate contact with each student.

- **Introduce yourself to students and learn their names as quickly as possible.**

Knowing the names of your students enables you to make a personal connection. Calling students by name

helps to build positive relationships and allows you to deal promptly with misbehavior.

■ **Introduce students to one another.**

Create an enjoyable way for students to meet each other and feel comfortable participating in class activities.

■ **Teach procedures that are needed immediately and present your rules for behavior.**

Teach your procedures and rules just as you would any content area. Procedures related to students' personal needs (such as where to store belongings and how to get the teacher's attention) should be explained and practiced immediately. Then introduce your rules and provide students an opportunity to discuss the meaning of the rules. Give specific examples. Helping students understand the rationale behind the rules encourages student buy-in and cooperation.

■ **Introduce students to the classroom.**

Acquaint students with the room by describing each area and how it will be used. When students know where to go and where to find things, it helps eliminate disturbing interruptions and unnecessary questions.

■ **Lead a learning activity that is simple and fun.**

Plan an introductory lesson that will create interest in your subject. Including an appropriate academic activity on the first day sends the signal that your classroom is a place for learning and a place where students will be productive and successful.

■ **Plan for maximum contact with students.**

Consider using whole class instruction in order to have maximum contact with all students. Move around the room to establish your presence, and stay with the class unless it is absolutely necessary to leave the room. If visitors arrive, invite them into the room for a brief stay or ask

them to come back at a scheduled time. In short, be visible, available, and in charge.

First Three Weeks

Good classroom management cannot be established in one day. In fact, researchers have found that effective elementary teachers devote the first three weeks to presenting, reinforcing, and reviewing their rules and procedures until they become automatic. While less time is needed at the upper grade levels, considerable attention is still required to teach instructional procedures.

Investing enough time at the beginning of the year to firmly establish your classroom management system will result in a classroom that is focused on teaching and learning during the remainder of the year.

Tips for Reinforcing Rules and Procedures

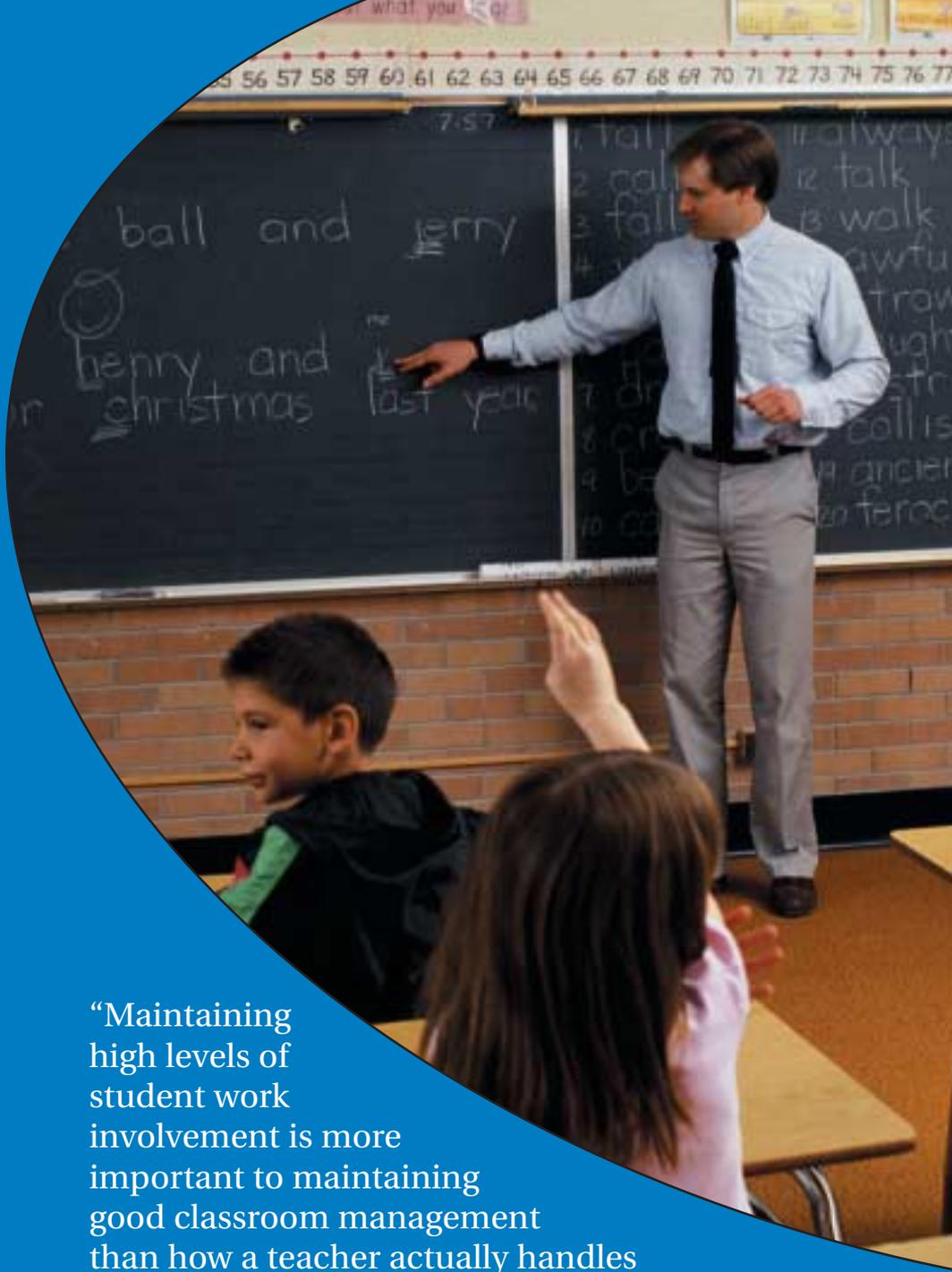
1. Actively monitor the classroom and observe and assess students' needs.
2. Provide feedback to students about their performance, rewarding them through praise or special privileges when their behavior is appropriate.
3. Stop inappropriate behavior immediately, applying a consequence consistent with the misbehavior.
4. If a procedure is not working well, modify or replace it. However, be sure that you explain the new procedure and give students opportunities to practice it.
5. Reteach the rules as necessary (especially before holidays and after school vacations).

Stage 3: Throughout the Year

Once students know what's expected of them and know that they will be held accountable for their actions, the teacher's primary role changes. From that point on, teachers maintain good classroom management by:

- designing lessons that actively involve all students;
- providing instruction at an appropriate level of difficulty;
- capturing students' interest and helping them see the progress they are making; and
- delivering instruction smoothly and at an appropriate pace.

Copyright © American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO (AFT 2003). Permission is hereby granted to AFT state and local affiliates to reproduce and distribute copies of this work for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that copies are distributed at or below cost, and that the author, source, and copyright notice are included on each copy. Any distribution of such materials by third parties who are outside of the AFT or its affiliates is prohibited without first receiving the express written permission of the AFT.



“Maintaining high levels of student work involvement is more important to maintaining good classroom management than how a teacher actually handles misbehavior.”

—JACOB KOUNIN
Wayne State University



A Union of Professionals

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
555 New Jersey Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
202/879-4400
www.aft.org

Educational Issues Department
Item Number 39-0036
August 2003