

About MEA-MFT and How We Can Help You Succeed

- **MEA-MFT is your professional association.**
- **We are here to help you succeed and grow as a teacher.**
 - **MEA-MFT is your voice!**



MEA-MFT is a powerful voice for your rights, your students, and your working conditions - whether it's in your community, at school board meetings, in the news media, before the Board of Public Education, or in the Montana Legislature.

When MEA-MFT speaks about education, Montana listens. They listen because we represent over 16,000 hard-working teachers and public employees who have made public service their chosen profession.

MEA-MFT members own their own association. When you join MEA-MFT, you know your colleagues and co-workers are all behind you. You are a member of a team that is working to ensure the future of public education in Montana and in our nation.

MEA-MFT's core services to Montana teachers include:

- Professional development conference and workshops
- Research and publications
- Leadership training
- Legal services
- Financial services
- Health and life insurance options
- Lobbying on issues that affect kids and teachers
- Protection of your rights and working conditions through bargaining, etc.
- We hope you will take advantage of what MEA-MFT membership can offer you!

Classroom Organization

The physical environment of your classroom is extremely important to effective teaching and learning. Many first-year teachers tend to underestimate this importance. Here are some simple guidelines to help you make your classroom teacher, learner, and community friendly.



The 4 BE's of quality learning space

- BE sensitive to the messages communicated to students by the classroom environment.
- BE able to evaluate the effectiveness of the classroom setting.

- BE alert to times when physical arrangement may be causing learning problems.
- BE able and willing to modify the environment when necessary.

To help you implement the 4 BE's, here are three principles plus guidelines that have proven to be effective in setting up a classroom:

PRINCIPLE 1: The physical environment of the classroom supports tasks to be carried out there.

Guidelines:

- 1) Frequently used classroom materials are accessible to students at all times.
- 2) Shelves and storage areas are well organized so it's clear where materials and equipment belong.
- 3) Pathways throughout the room, such as those to pencil sharpener, drinking fountains, or trashcans, are designed to avoid congestion.
- 4) Seating arrangements allow students a clear view of instructional presentations.
- 5) Seating arrangement and teaching space allows you to easily establish collective and individual contact with all students.
- 6) Seating arrangements are consistent with the amount of contact among students desired (for example, if you don't want group discussion, don't arrange students in a small group or circle.)
- 7) Stock your room with a variety of activities or materials that are relevant to content or curriculum.
- 8) Alter physical space to meet student needs and generate student interest.

PRINCIPLE 2: The Physical Environment of the Classroom Provides Security and Pleasure.

Guidelines:

- 1) Add elements of softness in room.
- 2) Keep room temperature comfortable (a fan or space heater can help if the thermostat can't.)
- 3) Arrange classroom for freedom from hallway and other interference.
- 4) Create a retreat area for students to have separation from the rest of the class (but not removed from your visual observation.)
- 5) Use a variety of colors and textures to create a pleasing environment.
- 6) Use plants, colorful posters, and instructionally relevant bulletin board displays to decorate.
- 7) Make sure room complies with safety standards for fire, earthquake, and other emergency situations.
- 8) Secure equipment or materials with locks and latches as appropriate.

PRINCIPLE 3: The Physical Environment Reflects the People who Teach and Learn There.

- 1) Personalize classroom space so that it communicates information about you and your students.
- 2) Display student work as well as evidence of your own accomplishments or experiences (e.g. teacher certificate, diplomas, merit awards, family photos, etc.)

Classroom Management

Classroom management can be the most trying aspect of any new teacher's first weeks. Maintaining student interest and respect while providing good teaching is a challenge for seasoned pros and it can be really tough for beginning teachers.

The following sections on managing classroom behavior and learning can help you to get things off to a good start...



CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE MANAGERS OF STUDENT BEHAVIOR

Successful managers of student behavior do the following:

1. Before the beginning of the school year, carefully consider the guidelines needed to promote positive student behaviors;
2. Establish three to five overarching rules by which students can be guided to develop positive behaviors State them clearly.
 - Make them short and easy to memorize.
 - State them positively.
 - Get a commitment (show of hands, vote, contract, bulletin board display).
3. Teach each rule (share expectations) and its positive and negative consequences;
4. Discuss, teach, and reinforce the rules until students regularly demonstrate the expected behaviors;
5. Review the rules when necessary over the course of the school year or when individual students are disruptive;
6. Modify rules that aren't working;

7. Organize daily routines that enable school-related activities to proceed safely, smoothly, and effectively;
8. Include students in the performance of daily routines by giving them tasks and responsibilities;
9. Praise students for abiding by the rules and procedures;
10. Provide corrective feedback to students who do not follow the rules and procedures;
11. Document behavior problems and record actions taken to use for discussions with school administrators, parents, or other school staff;
12. Model the behavior expected from students:
 - Be the kind of person children like and trust; be firm, fair, friendly, courteous, enthusiastic, confident; keep your sense of humor!

Developing Instructional Routines

Believe it or not, standard routines and procedures are some of the most effective tools in maintaining classroom discipline.

Like other classroom rules, you should teach standard routines and procedures to make sure students understand that there are expectations for behavior in your classroom. The following is a suggested list of common activities for which you may want to develop and teach routines:



USE OF CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL FACILITIES

- Use of computer stations, learning centers
- Use of shared materials, bookshelves, drawers
- Use of teacher's desk and storage areas
- Access to bathrooms, drinking fountains, sink, bathroom, pencil sharpener
- Entering and leaving the classroom

- Fire drill
- School assemblies
- Cafeteria
- Library

END OF SCHOOL DAY OR CLASS

- Clean up and putting away materials
- Organizing for different classes
- 'Wind-down' routine or activity
- Dismissal

STUDENT WORK

- Paper headings
- Pen or pencil?
- Neatness
- Incomplete assignment
- Late assignment
- Missing assignment
- Due dates/times of day when due
- Make-up assignments due to absences

FEEDBACK AND GRADING

- Giving specific feedback - grades, written comments, conferences - when and how will different types of feedback be given?
- Determining report card grade - what's included, how is it weighted?
- Grading daily assignments
- Recording grades
- Checking and returning corrections

Handling Disruptive Students

When individual students continue to act out in spite of preventive measures, it becomes necessary to use interventions to reshape behavior. The following suggested interventions are good first steps in working with disruptive students:

Social skills training - Many children who misbehave simply have never been taught how to behave. They have problems developing friendships and meeting adult expectations. Teaching social skills helps them develop good relationships with other children and adults. Social skills training should involve the following three steps:

1. **Model** or show the students how to perform the skill or good behavior that you expect.
2. **Practice**: allow the students to practice using the skill through role-playing situations.

3. **Reinforce** acceptable performance by letting students know how well they are performing the skill or behavior in question.

Enhancing positive behavior - Catching students doing good things can be much more productive for overall classroom discipline than simply apprehending rule offenders.

When students act appropriately, we want to increase that behavior. Rewards from adults (both tangible and intangible) can be meaningful in these situations and have a powerful effect on behavior.

Be careful however: typically the older a student is, public praise for behavior from teachers can lead to negative peer attention. Keep some compliments and praise confidential - through a note on an assignment or a quick individual interaction before or after class.<

The following rules for behavior enhancement have proven to be effective:

- Specifically define the behavior being rewarded.
- Determine and give reinforcements individually if necessary - especially for older students (middle school and high school).
- There are no reinforcers that are rewards for everyone - i.e. if you throw out praise to everyone, it won't be meaningful for individual behavior modification.
- Use tangible rewards (stickers, stars, etc.) when appropriate, but accompany with intangible rewards such as praise.
- Always work to diminish dependency on tangible rewards.

Reducing negative behavior - The opposite side of the behavior enhancement coin is behavior reduction. It is not always possible to reduce negative behavior by rewarding acceptable behavior. Once antisocial behavior patterns are set, they may be difficult to change. In these instances, it may be necessary to combine behavior enhancement with behavior reduction techniques.

Develop a hierarchy of consequences

While the "three strikes, you're out" policy has its problems, the notion of a hierarchy of consequences can be effective. A typical hierarchy of consequences in successful classrooms includes:

Consequence 1 - signaled by a direct "look" from the adult in charge, or by a step that brings the adult nearer to the student.

Consequence 2 - consequence might be a verbal warning or reminder that the behavior is unacceptable.

Consequence 3 - in-class "time-out" from immediate activity for a specified length of time or a change of student's location in classroom for closer observation or to remove from distractions.

Consequence 4 - Conference with the student to discover cause and reinforce acceptable behavior.

Consequence 5 - Notification of building administrator.

Consequence 6 - Contacting the parent or guardian.

Consequence 7 - Extended time-out or suspension

Direct punishments such as after-school detention, withdrawal of classroom privileges, or direct verbal admonishment should be used only rarely -- and only in connection with efforts to teach and enhance more desirable social skills.

Behavior management techniques to avoid

The following behavior management techniques usually have the opposite of the intended effect. They can alienate students, make communications more difficult, or escalate problem behavior:

- Forcing students to do something that is impossible for them to do at that time.
- Ridiculing or making fun of the student.
- Forcing a student to admit having lied, especially in public.
- Demanding a confession from a student.
- Asking students why they act out (when you know they do not understand their own behaviors).
- Making disapproving personal comments about students or their families.
- Comparing one student's anti-social behavior with another student's behavior.
- Aggressively confronting a student in public or private.
- Yelling at a student.
- Engaging in verbal battles with a student.
- Making unrealistic threats.

Discipline in Specific Situations

The responsibility for good student discipline rests primarily with the classroom teacher. Most authorities agree that without a comfortable disciplinary situation, the teacher's job becomes frustrating and often unbearable, and as a result, little teaching or learning takes place.

It is very important that you establish clearly and immediately the behavior pattern to be followed by the students in your classes. Actually, students welcome reasonable discipline and have respect for teachers who follow a consistent policy.

Ask your support teacher or Association Representative for copies of discipline policies for your district and/or building. Your classroom policy should reflect the district guidelines.

Here are some of the more common discipline situations and a pattern for dealing with them.

Q. What do you do when you have a confrontation with a student?

A. Before you act, you should know:

What triggered the confrontation? Did you issue a challenge? ("Do you want to leave this class?")

Did you "put down" the student? Is the student challenging you?

Can the situation be avoided or delayed? Should there be a cooling off period? Should there be an audience?

What are the consequences? How will this result in a better relationship?

You can try:

- Showing that you are in control of yourself by using relaxed gestures and a steady voice.
- Moving to a neutral location.
- Restating problems or feelings you think you hear, using "feeling" words. ("I feel that you are...")
- Focusing on specific behavior and not on the person.
- Withholding judgment until there is an agreement on what happened.

Q. What do you do when a student seems to be a constant distraction to the rest of the class?

A. Before you act, you should know:

- What need the student is trying to fill (acceptance, love, attention, and worth).
- What the consequences have been for the student's behavior up to now.
- What attitude the other students demonstrate toward this student (for example, respect, dislike, envy).
- Whether this is a problem of behavior or attitude.

You can try:

- Planning a contract with the student that specifies what you will do in recognition of a change in behavior.
- Using a "time out" place to remove the student from the situation. This place in the room, contains no distractions, and is not a punishment, but rather an aid for focusing.
- Telling the class there will be 10 minutes of free time if the work is completed on schedule. Put the number 10 on the board. If distractions occur, cross out the 10 and reduce the free time to 9. Usually, other students will put the pressure on the troublemaker to behave.

Q. What do you do when students have tuned you out and are not listening?

A. Before you act, you should know:

- What percentage of the students are tuning you out?
- Has tuning you out become a habit for these students?

- Why are students tuning you out? Are you saying relevant things? Have you been talking too long? Are you talking beyond the students' capacity to understand? Are you excited about what you are saying? Is the student preoccupied with personal problems?
- What does your response to the "tuned out" students say to them? Are you personally offended? Have you become defensive? Are you disappointed with yourself?

You can try:

- Ignoring these students, letting them experience the consequences of their behavior. Enjoy the students who are tuned in.
- Probing some other interest which these students may have.
- Observing closely for possible learning problems or physical problems that may be influencing these students.
- Stating your feelings about their behavior.

Q. What do you do when a student curses or uses an obscene gesture?

A. Before you act, you should know:

- If the student knows the meaning of what he or she is saying or doing.
- What triggered this behavior (anger, attempt to be funny, need for attention, shock value)?
- Who this was intended for? (Was this meant for another student? Was this meant for you to see or react to?)
- Is this worth a confrontation--major or minor.
- If you can turn this into a positive learning experience.

You can try:

- Not registering shock, anger, or embarrassment--but keeping your cool.
- Asking the student the meaning of what he/she said or did.
- Calling a conference with the repeat offender (and his/her parents) to emphasize your position on cursing in school.

Q. What do you do when two students are fighting?

Act immediately. If possible, separate them. If not possible, send for another adult.

A. Before you do anything else, you should answer these questions.

- Should you remove the combatants from those who watched the fight? This could mean less pressure on the combatants to put on a show for others. This could mean less pressure on you to act hastily for the sake of others.
- Do either you or the students need a cooling-off period to think about what happened and the consequences?
- Are these students frequently involved in fights, or is this an unusual situation?
- Do you clearly understand the most recent court rulings on corporal punishment and their implications?

You can try:

- Keeping your composure and speaking and acting as unemotionally as possible.
- Keeping the situation in perspective--if the students have cooled down, don't ignite their anger.
- Determining what triggered the fight.
- Determining whether there was a clear-cut aggressor and whether only that student deserves punishment.
- Allowing students to verbalize their anger.
- Helping students look at better ways to deal with the situation.
- Selecting a consequence that is humane and fair to both students.
- Stating that once the consequences are carried out, the issue is gone from your mind and should be gone from their minds, too.

Good classroom discipline should not be thought of merely as being strict, but as a cause-and-effect relationship. Students should be made aware that certain types of behavior will cause unpleasant results, while others will elicit teacher recognition and praise. If you use this cause-and-effect approach, most students will naturally develop good behavior attitudes and responses.

In summary, you can achieve good classroom control, acceptable student conduct, and real student achievement if you are firm, fair, friendly, consistent, and prepared.

- Divide research assignments into small segments and have committees research individual segments.
- Divide the total group into subgroups and let individuals within each subgroup respond to one another's written work according to established criteria.

For more ideas on encouraging cooperation and improving self-esteem in the classroom, ask your colleagues or system resource professionals.

Parent Conferences

Tips for more successful parent conferences

Communicating with parents is one of the most important things we do as teachers. When we can work together with a child's parents toward common goals, we improve the atmosphere for learning.

Most successful teacher-parent "teams" begin with a conference; usually one conducted before there's a real need to meet.

Of course, while parent conferences can be one of the most helpful techniques in a teacher's "bag of tricks," we also know that sometimes they can be a discouraging waste of time--or even turn into ugly confrontations.

Here are some tips to help make your parent conferences productive and successful:

1. Invite both parents.

Encourage both parents to attend conferences when possible. Misunderstandings are less common if both parents hear what you have to say, and you'll be able to gauge the kind of support both parents give the child.

(Of course, remember that both mother and father may not be available. Many children live in single-parent homes. And, even with two parents, both parents often work outside the home. So be careful not to unwittingly hurt a child's feelings by assuming the availability of parents based on a father-at-work and mother-at home family.)

2. Make contact early.

You'll get your relationship with parents off to a good start if you contact them early in the year, perhaps with a memo or newsletter sent home to all pupils. Give parents an outline of what their children will be studying, and let them know you'll be happy to meet with them during the year. (Be sure to say how and when they may contact you for conferences.)

3. Allow enough time.

Schedule plenty of time for the meeting. Twenty to 30 minutes is usually adequate. If you're scheduling back-to-back conferences, be sure to allow enough time between them (10 minutes or so) so you can make the necessary notes on the just-concluded conferences and prepare for the upcoming one.

4. Plan ahead.

Have in mind a general--but flexible--outline of what you're going to say, including a record of student progress, a review of strengths and needs, and a proposed plan of action.

5. Greet parents near the entrance they'll use.

You'll alleviate anxiety and frustration (nothing is more confusing to the uninitiated than wandering around these look-alike school hallways trying to find the right classroom), and parents will feel more welcome.

6. Be ready for questions.

Be prepared to answer specific questions parents may have. They're likely to ask questions such as:

- What is my child's ability level?
- Is my child working up to his/her ability level?
- How is my child doing in specific subjects?
- Does my child cause any trouble?
- Does my child have any specific skills or abilities in schoolwork?

7. Get your papers organized in advance.

Assemble your grade book, test papers, samples of the student's work, attendance records and other pertinent data ahead of time. That way you won't be fumbling through stacks on your desk during the meeting.

8. Avoid physical barriers.

Don't sit behind your desk, while forcing the parents to squeeze into the student desks in the front row, or to perch miserably on folding chairs. Arrange conference-style seating, if possible, so that you'll all feel equal.

9. Get the name right.

Don't assume that Jennifer Peabody's mother is Mrs. Peabody. Jennifer's mother may well have remarried since Jennifer was born. Check your records ahead of time to make sure you have the names right. And don't assume that the wrinkled, gray-haired gentleman coming with Johnny is his grandfather. It could be his father, or an uncle. Politely ask.

10. Open on a positive note.

Begin conferences on a warm, positive note to relax everyone. Start with a positive statement about the student's abilities, schoolwork, or interests.

11. Structure the session.

As soon as the parents arrive, review the structure of the conference--the why, what, how and when--so you'll both have an "agenda." (Remember, of course, that parents often come with their own agenda or questions they want answered, so you'll have to be flexible.)

12. Emphasize collaboration.

Let the parents know you want to work together in the best interests of the student. A statement such as "You need to see me as soon as possible to discuss John's poor study habits" only arouses hostility. But "I'd like to discuss with you how we might work together to improve John's study habits" gets the relationship off on the right foot.

13. Listen to what parents say.

Despite the fact that we spend nearly a third of our lives listening, most adults are poor listeners. We concentrate on what we're going to say next, or we let our minds drift off to other concerns, or we hear only part of what a speaker is saying. You'll get more out of a parent conference if you listen carefully to what parents are saying to you.

14. Ask about the student.

You don't want to pry, of course, but remember to ask parents if there's anything they think you should know about the student (such as study habits, relationship with siblings, important events in his or her life) that may affect schoolwork.

15. Focus on solutions.

Ideally, all parent conferences would concern only positive events. Realistically, many conferences are held because there's a problem somewhere. Things will go more smoothly if you'll focus on solutions rather than on the child's problem. Discuss what you and the parents can do to help improve the situation. Plan together a course of action.

16. Don't judge.

It may not always be possible to react neutrally to what parents say--their values may be very different from your own--but communicating your judgment of parents' attitudes or behaviors can be a roadblock to a productive relationship with them. Be respectful of parents at all times.

17. Use body language.

Nonverbal cues set the mood of the conference. Smile, nod, make eye contact and lean forward slightly. You'll be using your body's language to let parents know you're interested and approving.

18. Forget the jargon.

Education jargon like "criterion-referenced testing," "perceptual skills," and "least restrictive environment" may be just double-talk to many parents.

19. Turn the other cheek.

In routine parent conferences, it's unusual to run into a parent who is abusive and hostile. But it can happen. Try not to be rude, whatever the provocation. Hear out the parents in as pleasant a manner as possible, without getting defensive if you can.

20. Be specific in your comments.

Parents may flounder if you deal only in generalities. Instead of saying, "She doesn't accept responsibility," pin down the problem by pointing out, "Amanda had a week to finish her book report, but she wrote only two paragraphs."

21. Offer a suggested course of action.

Parents appreciate being given some specific direction. If Jane is immature, it might be helpful to suggest parents give her a list of weekly chores, allow her to take care of a pet, or give her a notebook to write down assignments.

22. Keep a brief record of the conference.

You may have reason later to refer to the record of what was said at the conference and what suggestions for improvement were made. Make notes as soon as possible after the conference while details are fresh in your mind.

23. Ask for parents' opinions.

Let parents know that you're interested in their opinions, that you're eager to answer their questions, and that you want to work with them throughout the year to help give their child the best possible education.

24. Focus on strengths.

It's very easy for parents to feel defensive because many of them see their own faults in their children. You can help by reviewing the child's strengths and areas of need, rather than dwelling on criticism or stressing weaknesses.

25. Summarize.

Before the conference ends, review the discussion and the actions that you and the parents have decided to take.

26. Wind up on a positive note.

When you can, save at least one encouraging comment or positive statement about the student for the end of the conference.

27. Meet again if you need to.

If you feel you need more time, arrange another meeting later rather than trying to rush everything before the students get back from art class.

Building A Professional Image

As a first-year teacher, you have no name recognition, no reputation, and no credibility. Think of it as a clean slate. Your behavior and your interaction with all the groups that make up the school community will not only define your image, but also impact the image of the profession as a whole.

The ideas that follow are time-tested, positive image-makers.

Dress professionally. While dress codes for teachers have relaxed a great deal in recent years, it's in your best interest to dress professionally.

Students, parents, and your colleagues will have more respect for you if you do. As an added bonus, you will help improve the overall public image of teachers. That will make community members more likely to support your profession, your school, and your students. (Yes - it is possible to be comfortable and look professional on the job!)

Be very, very careful about your Facebook site.

Facebook and other social networking sites are great fun to use. But they can get a teacher fired faster than almost anything. Your new students and their parents will look you up on the social Internet as soon as they know your name. Do you really want them to see **all** of those photos of your trip to Las Vegas?

Remember, no matter where you go in your community, you are known as a teacher.

This is especially true in smaller communities. You'll be held to a higher standard of conduct than other citizens.

Display your degrees and certificates.

Every other professional has these documents framed and hanging on their office walls; you should too. Not only is it good for those times when parents visit your classroom, but think about the positive effect it has on your students.

From the beginning, let parents know you believe a working partnership with them is best for students.

- **Send messages home about what parents can do to support learning.**

- Invest in stamped postcards - once a week send a postcard to a parent with a positive note.
- Call at least one parent a week to share a positive attribute of a student.
- Invite parents to join the class and assist with school projects.

- **Send letters of welcome to new students.**

When students transfer during the year, they and their parents often have questions about how to fit in. You could put together a survival kit for new students that includes a map of the area (ask the AAA), locations of favorite student hangouts, dress code (or at least what's normal--ask a student to write this part), homework expectations, and a list of what has already been covered in each subject.

- **In early November, send home a list of good books for parents to consider for holiday giving.**

List a few academic books, but include mostly books that are interesting or entertaining, and at the same time of literary or academic merit, as they relate to your teaching area. Also, if you can find one extra hour at the beginning of the school year, divide all your students' names into nine or ten lists according to the month of their birthdays. Then send home a book gift list the month before each student's birthday, making the distribution a first-of-the-month activity. In June, distribute book lists for those with birthdays in July, August and September.

- **Let parents know about the success of their children in the classroom.**

If the only time parents hear from you about their child's progress is when there's a problem, they will transfer those negative feelings to you.

- **Don't forget grandparents.**

Send home requests for a parent or grandparent to write down (in a space provided by the request sheet) a few words relating to a strong memory or an anecdote from their own lives in reference to the topic being studied in class.

Professional community outreach

In addition to your own professional image, you have tremendous power to shape the public's perception of public schools and teachers. Community outreach is an important way to gain respect for your profession and support for your school and students.

As you read the following **tips for community outreach**, consider how they fit with your own personality and knowledge about your own community. Choose those that will work for you or adapt the ideas for your own setting. In addition to these projects, do get involved in the community outreach programs initiated by your local MEA-MFT affiliate.

- **Let your students be ambassadors through writing.**

Teach your students to write letters to members of the community, and then actually send them. The letters may relate specifics of a classroom project that tie into a community organization activity or state an opinion about how young people might be persuaded to participate more fully in community affairs. The best lessons to be learned by students from such letter writing are those of stating a suggestion tactfully and gracefully, writing with a positive tone, and making a point clearly and concisely.

- **Let your students be ambassadors through speaking and presenting.**

Invite community leaders or professionals, such as local businesspersons, politicians, scientists, and others to visit your classroom. Have students present research, recite speeches, or simply read to these dignitaries. Better yet, take your students to visit them to share a joint learning experience. Some community leaders make decisions that impact you and your classroom - it is highly appropriate and beneficial for them to be invited to be involved in education on a regular basis.

- **See what happens when you assign an essay or paragraph on the topic "The best thing about my school is..."**

After using samples of class entries in the classroom and discussing them for form and content, submit three or four of the most interesting ones to the local newspaper, expressing pride in these students' perception of their role as learners.

Preparing for a Substitute

Tools for the substitute

Your classroom will run more smoothly and substitutes will love working for you if you leave them data to make their day as your replacement a pleasant one.

Create a Substitute File. Let the school office know exactly where the file is located. Your file should include the following:

- Name of VIP's - Principal, school secretary, regular classroom visitors
- Names of nearby teachers who can help if subs have problems
- Daily schedule time, day, recesses, etc.
- Up-to-date seating chart
- Children with special needs
- Children who go to special classes & times
- Where to find texts, lesson plans, supplies
- Procedures: Openings, Lunch, Dismissal, Fire Drill, Discipline, Privileges, Student Illness
- Free time
- Additional information & instructions

If your absence is planned, create specific lesson plans for subs to use. Also have a generic lesson plan or activity that can get a sub through one day in case your absence is not planned -- for example, in case you get sick and you can't get in to create a lesson plan.

Dealing With Dangerous Students

Dangerous students are rare, but education employees are facing more and more of them in the schools. Teachers need to know their rights, responsibilities, and ways to protect themselves and students. As with any problem, be sure to contact your local MEA-MFT president if you need help.

This article was written to help education employees deal with this critical issue. For purposes of this article, dangerous students are defined as those who cause serious harm to another person, to themselves, or to their surroundings.

Behaviorally dangerous students.

Protect yourself before an incident occurs:

1. Know your school policy and procedures.
2. Know or develop a school-wide CRISIS plan.
3. Prepare yourself for crisis events. **KEEP COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS.**
 - a. Have a working system of communications using tools such as the intercom, code word with another teacher or school employee who works near you. Develop your own safety net that works for you.
 - b. Regularly review and update your plan to meet the needs of the current population.
4. Classroom teachers should develop, post, and distribute to parents and students a well-defined discipline policy for their classrooms. Suggestion: Send the policy home for signature by a parent or guardian.

When a student's behavior becomes threatening, school employees are advised to:

1. Notify another adult for help, i.e., call on the intercom, send another student for help.
2. Isolate the student, **BUT KEEP HIM OR HER UNDER VISUAL CONTACT.** This may mean you have to remove all other students from the area.
3. **DO NOT TOUCH THE STUDENT UNLESS THE STUDENT IS A DANGER TO SELF, OTHERS, OR PROPERTY.**
4. Have an administrator or designee remove the student to a secure area. It is the responsibility of the administrator or designee to notify parents or guardians and appropriate authorities regarding the incident and district policy and to arrange a meeting to coordinate a plan for the reintegration of the

student into school and/or the classroom.

5. If you receive an injury, seek medical help and file for Workers' Compensation immediately. (Contact your local MEA-MFT president for help.)

6. Review your district discipline policy.

7. Document the incident and the sequence of events. KEEP COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS.

a. Identify all witnesses.

b. Identify the number of students present.

c. Identify the student sent to get the administrator/designee.

d. Document all action taken by you, the person providing assistance, and the administrator including BUT NOT LIMITED TO:

- Intervention strategy
- Any physical contact with the student
- Appearance of, or lack of, bruises
- Weapon(s) present
- Language used by you and the student
- Administrative response
- Any contact with parents/guardians

8. Notify your local MEA-MFT president, or MEA-MFT field representative.

9. Participate in developing a plan of action for reintegration of the student into school: Involve parents/guardian, student, administrator, specialists, and all staff working with student, including librarian, PE teacher, nurse, teacher aide, etc.

Striving for Success: Tips and Standards for Improving your Practice

Standards for accomplished teaching

Accomplished teaching is difficult to define and even more difficult to achieve. The [National Board for Professional Teaching Standards](#) has sought to recognize and reward quality teaching in America through a variety of professional standards and certifications for teaching professionals.

Although teachers new to the profession are not eligible to pursue National Board Certification, all teachers should be aware of the FIVE CORE PROPOSITIONS OF ACCOMPLISHED TEACHING developed by the National Board. By incorporating the five core propositions into your practice, you will assure that you are doing your best to enhance student learning.

THE FIVE CORE PROPOSITIONS OF ACCOMPLISHED TEACHING:

What teachers should know and be able to do

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects.
3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
5. Teachers are members of learning communities.

As you prepare and reflect daily, try to keep the 5 core propositions in mind. Ask yourself the following questions...

Questions related to Standard 1:

- How did I demonstrate my commitment to students and their learning?
- What can I do to improve my effectiveness with individual students?
- Am I diagnosing individual student strengths and weaknesses and using that knowledge to alter my practice?

Questions related to Standard 2:

- What content areas am I comfortable teaching? What content areas need review prior to further lessons?
- Do students understand the content? How do I know?
- Does my pedagogy improve or hinder student understanding of content?
- Is there a better way to teach this particular lesson? Have I consulted with other professionals or professional resources to find out?

Questions related to Standard 3:

- How do I assess student learning? Are my assessments systematic and comprehensive? Do they involve multiple forms of assessment and evidence of student learning?
- Do I know if every student has met state, local, and personal expectations for the content I have been teaching?

Questions related to Standard 4:

- How am I changing my teaching to assure more effective learning?
- What can I do better or differently next time to be more effective?

Questions related to Standard 5:

- How do I share with and learn from other professionals?
- How do I interact with other professionals to improve student learning in my school?

- How to I work with community members to foster my own knowledge as well as the knowledge of my students?

Many of these are tough questions. Some are impossible for a new teacher to even contemplate answering. But remember, the 5 Core Propositions are intended to be guidelines for your entire career. That's why National Board Certification is only offered to those who have at least three years of teaching experience. However, if you keep the 5 core propositions in mind, you will have an immediate framework to improve your skills as a classroom professional.

New teachers should also review the NBPTS standards that are relevant to their individual grade-level and curricular duties. These standards can be obtained from NBPTS at the following website: www.nbpts.org

Good Advice From Montana Teachers

Montana teachers are excellent sources of expertise and advice. Here are some comments and tips from several Montana teachers, including Teachers of the Year and National Board Certified teachers, who have demonstrated excellence in their classrooms. We hope you will find inspiration, good ideas, and support in the words of these Montana educators.

"Develop a bag of tricks."



1. You are now a member of a proud profession that takes pride in its accomplishments. We have a history of great student achievement and support of our fellow teachers.
2. Remember that sometimes the only thing that separates hope and despair is a good night's sleep.
3. Develop a "bag of tricks" that consists of activities, ideas, projects, and learning games that run from a few minutes to a period or more in length. There will always be a time when you need a "filler"

activity, and it is a stress reducer to have a file on hand.

4. Plan, plan, and plan some more. Your first year at times will be overwhelming. Great planning will be your best friend.

5. The best surprise is no surprise. Try your best not to surprise your students, your parents, or your administrators.

6. Ask questions and demand answers. Find a mentor. All of us needed assistance when we started this profession. Don't be afraid to ask for help from other teachers.

7. Find a discipline plan that works for you. We all have discipline plans that are a collage of techniques that seem to work for our teaching style. A good plan doesn't happen over night, and unfortunately won't work for all children. Don't give up, and remember flexibility prevents senility.

8. Refer often to this quote by Elspeth Campbell Murphy: "If I had been a kid in my class today, would I want to come back tomorrow?"

9. Remember that most students are awesome most of the time. Most parents are grateful and supportive most of the time. Most administrators are caring and offer encouragement most of the time.

10. Join your local union. Pay scales, due process, human rights, professional development, liability insurance, and bargaining issues are important. Get involved and learn to love and experience the joy of spreading knowledge. What you do is important.

Jon Runnalls, 2003 Montana Teacher of the Year and MEA-MFT member, Helena (from his "Survival Guide for Beginning Teachers")

"Thank you for being a real hero."

You are a REAL hero! You have chosen to be a teacher in the most frightening of times. It is education that will give our children, our future, the tools to analyze, to assess, to inquire, to make decisions based upon truth and goodness, not upon fear and hatred.

It is education that will enable them to engage in collaboration, rather than warfare with nations around the globe, creating peaceful resolutions to global concerns - and all concerns are global, now. It is quality education that will give us the chance to keep this nation free.

Don't give up your willingness to fight for what is right when you close that classroom door. Stay involved. Help to keep education at the forefront of the political circle. Remember that you touch the

future. Every day you have the opportunity to present a model for your students to follow so that they, as our link with the future, will know how to stand up for what is right and what is good.

Remember that, by 8:30 a.m., those little beings in front of you have already had many interactions with the world, some negative and some positive. Try to look at **their** world -- the one that is created within your classroom walls -- through **their** eyes. Look at ALL of your students with the same compassion and kindness that you would hope for if you were in their shoes.

Give to yourself, as well as to your students. Unless you take the time to care about yourself, you will eventually run out of energy to care about your students. You can arrive at school at 7:00 every morning. You can stay in your classroom every night until 5:30. You can organize and straighten and plan. You can take work home and correct and correct and correct. When you retire, do you want to be remembered as a teacher who was really well organized... or one who CARED?

In the eyes of your students, you possess more prestige than any doctor, more clout than any lawyer, and a daunting power to help or hinder their growth as productive human beings. Thank you for choosing the greatest profession on earth. Thank you for being a REAL hero!

Robin Zeal, 2001 Montana Teacher of the Year and MEA-MFT member, Whitefish

"End every day on a happy note."

I spend the first week of school having the students participate in several community building activities. This validates that everyone in the classroom is important, and it gives me an opportunity to observe and determine which students will work well together in future cooperative learning activities.

The Cooperative Classroom-Empowering Learning, by Lynda A. Baloché, is the best book I have found on cooperative activities. It is teacher friendly and can be modified for all grades and content areas.

Also, I have my students generate their own classroom rules. I begin the first day of school by reading a short story about a monster that comes to school. (Of course, the story requires audience participation.) The students then brainstorm all the things the monster did that prevented the other students from learning.

The class formulates a lengthy list, the students use the list of inappropriate behaviors to think of five rules that would maintain our learning environment and prevent monstrous behavior from occurring during the year. I post the rules generated, and I also print a copy for each student to take home to their parents the first day. I find the students are excited about the rules when they are a part of the generating process. The students also help think of the consequences for not following the rules; however, at my level I do quite a bit of guiding at this point.

Most importantly, end every day on a happy note. Find a fun book, or simply develop some closing activity that sends everyone out the door with a smile. For young students, I read from the Junie B. Jones series the last five minutes of every day. Students leave laughing...and of course, I always say, "You won't believe what Junie B. will do tomorrow!"

Margaret Bowles, National Board Certified Teacher and MEA-MFT member, Townsend

"Don't try to be the students' buddy."

Try to remember that the most important thing you can do as a teacher is to build a thirst for knowledge within your students. To do this, tap into their own curiosity and desire for knowledge and build from it.

Throughout the year, have kids come up with questions they want to explore. Then, have the students investigate the questions themselves as a class or in small groups and come up with the answers. As a follow-up, they should tell the other students in the class what they learned and how they learned it.

In building effective classroom management, the biggest mistake often made by new teachers is trying too hard to earn student affection. Don't try to be "the good buddy" to your students. They will feel uncomfortable and you will lose respect.

Be kind and friendly, and don't be afraid to get involved in the children's lives, but always in the context that you are the adult in the classroom. Maintain your control and present yourself as a mature leader of classroom learning.

Don't worry about kids not liking you at first -- over time, the personal friendships with students will follow and will be more rewarding than anything you can possibly imagine.

Marcella Burke, Retired Teacher, Helena

Advice About Your Employment

Professional papers

Every educator should have a "professional papers" file that includes records and documents relating to your employment status. Get started by finding your letter of employment and placing it in a safe place right now. You can check off the other items listed below as you collect them to save.

- Your letter of employment
- Your teaching certificate
- Recertification units & credits
- Salary step up credits

- College transcripts
- Your teaching contract and any supplemental contracts
- Records relating to retirement benefits
- Leave records
- NEA Liability Insurance Policy
- Copies of your teaching schedule and assignments
- Your school system's salary schedule and your yearly salary notice
- Any correspondence to or from the school administration
- Any letters of reprimand or praise
- Resumes of any conferences with supervisors
- All professional evaluations
- Documentation of awards, commendations, or honors you receive
- Records of any job-related seminars, workshops or conferences you attend
- Letters to and from parents
- Brief accounts of parent conferences
- Record of any incidents that may increase your liability, such as disciplinary actions, student accidents and so forth.
- Proof of your membership in MEA-MFT, NEA, AFT, and your local MEA-MFT affiliate
- Local affiliate master contract
- School calendar
- System policy on discipline

Managing Your Money

- Nobody goes into teaching to get rich. The richness comes in working with great kids and colleagues.
- However, if you take a few simple steps, you can make your teaching paycheck stretch further than you might ever dream.
- Here are some tips.
- **How to read your paycheck**
 - A. GROSS PAY is what you wish you were getting. It's the total amount the district pays you based on the salary schedule in your district before taxes and other deductions.
 - B. FIT, or Fed. Inc. Tx. or FEDERAL INCOME TAX is the amount deducted from your pay and withheld by the IRS. The percentage taken from your gross pay depends on your personal tax bracket and the number of withholding exemptions you indicated on your W-4. The same goes for STATE INCOME TAX.
 - C. FICA is the government name for SOCIAL SECURITY taxes. (Rate by employer & employee is 7.65%). You should check your FICA records every three or four years to be

sure your account is being credited accurately. Your retirement benefits are affected by the accuracy of this account.

D. RETIREMENT contributions go to the Montana Teachers Retirement System. While you teach, this money works to provide you with a substantial pension program. Check your retirement/service credit annually.

E. OD, or OTHER DEDUCTIONS are those you have chosen. They could include tax-sheltered annuities, additional insurance, or association dues.

F. NET PAY is the amount left after all of the above has been taken out. The rest of this article offers some suggestions about how to handle your check.

- **How to handle your paycheck**

This is it! A new job, a regular paycheck, fringe benefits, and a built-in retirement plan.

- But before you head out to spend all that hard-earned money, let's talk about what you can look forward to in your first year of personal finances.
- One thing is certain: You will meet a lot of new "friends." Many of these new "friends" will be trying to sell you something. The offers could range from insurance products to a time-share condo in Florida.
- Before you make any financial decisions, take time to understand thoroughly your current position. Know what you will earn and how much of that you will get to keep. Don't plan on spending your salary. You can only spend real income, and that's what is left after all the deductions have been taken.
- With that figure in mind, determine what your expenses will be. List rent, groceries, taxes (property, per capita, occupational), phone, car (loan, gas, repairs), utilities, clothing, entertainment, and, most important, savings.
- **Comparison shopping**
Shop around for the best bank deal. Look for the one that charges you the least for services on checking and savings accounts and one that will pay you interest on your checking as well as on your savings account. Every payday, make two deposits--one into checking and the other into savings.
- Before you're ready to make decisions on insurance, you should find out what fringe benefits you already receive--health and life insurance. You will also begin accruing sick days, which act as a small disability insurance program.
- **Find out what fringe benefits you receive**
- Now you're ready to meet those new "friends" for a visit. They'll be eager to tell you all about the insurance program "you can't afford to pass up" while the rates are good and you're still

young. The first question to ask yourself is, "Do I really need this insurance (at any price)?"

- When someone offers you a "dreaded disease" policy, remember that coverage is limited only to the named disease and if you should happen to come down with something else, you won't be covered.
- Car insurance, if you have a car, is a must and is required by law. Even here, it pays to shop around. NEA Member Benefits offers excellent affordable car insurance through California Casualty. Check it out at www.neamb.com.
- If you own a home, it will most likely represent all of your earthly possessions. Insure it with a good homeowner's policy. Specifically, consider one with replacement value coverage. If you rent, remember that the landlord's policy only covers the property, not your personal possessions. Get a tenant insurance policy for your furniture, books, clothes, and valuables. Comparison-shopping is beneficial for all types of policies. Check out the insurance offerings through NEA and AFT at www.aft.org/benefits/ and www.neamb.com.
- You will be a target for life insurance agents -- not necessarily because they think you need life insurance -- rather because insurance agents make most of their commissions from the sale of life insurance. Remember to check on the school district coverage. It's likely that, at least for right now, you won't need any more personal coverage. If you decide that you do need more, talk to at least two other agents before you buy anything.
- **Stretching your paycheck**
Teacher pay in Montana is much lower than teachers deserve. MEA-MFT is working hard to change that through legislative action -- because after all, teachers have families to raise, too!

In the meantime, our national affiliates, NEA and AFT, offer many excellent programs to help you stretch your paycheck -- through discounts, affordable car and home insurance, low-rate credit cards, and many others. Don't miss these opportunities -- you can't afford to! Check them out at the [Member Benefits](#) section of this web site.

- **Saving your hard-earned cash**
There are many good ways to salt some money away. Here are a couple of them:
- **TDA (Tax-Deferred Account)** TDAs divert current income, thus avoiding immediate federal and state income taxes. Taxation is deferred until the money is taken out of the plan, usually at retirement. TDAs are one good way to put money aside and let it grow.
- *Withdrawals.* You may withdraw all or part of your funds when you reach age 59 and one-half, and you must start to take withdrawals by April 5 of the year after you reach age 70 and one-half. Withdrawals prior to age 59 and one-half are subject to 10 percent tax penalty. Some

contracts contain a loan provision, which allows you to borrow a portion of your funds from the program. These must be repaid within five years.

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- Settlement options are listed in the TDA contract. These usually provide for a fixed monthly annuity amount.
- *Investments:* Insurance companies provide most TDA contracts. They usually offer fixed or variable investments. Other plans are available from mutual fund companies and stockbrokers.
- *Fees and other charges:* Most TDA contracts are "no load," which means there are no front-end fees. These plans usually have early withdrawal fees. There are usually annual account management fees and/or administrative expenses.
- *Where to buy into a TDA:* Since TDAs require payroll deduction contributions, a plan must be put in place in the school district through the business office. This results in TDA sales representatives coming to the school to see you about the plans. Most purchases are made through insurance company representatives, some through mutual fund company representatives.
- **IRA (Individual Retirement Account)**
- *Tax-deferred status:* Same as the TDA.

Withdrawals: Same as the TDA; no loan provision in IRAs; withdrawal amounts are at the option of the plan owner, as long as they meet IRS minimums.

- *Investments:* You can select your own investment program in almost anything other than art, antiques, and precious metals. The choices among IRAs are usually wider than those offered in TDAs. Examples of IRA investments are Certificates of Deposit (CDs), stocks, mutual funds, partnerships, and money market funds.
- *Fees and other charges:* Most banks, savings and loans, and credit unions do not charge fees. IRA accounts through commercial companies usually charge annual maintenance fees. The so-called "Self-directed" accounts are subject to broker commissions on the buying and selling of the investments in the IRAs as well as to annual account maintenance fees.
- *Where to invest in this plan:* You can invest in an IRA at any bank, savings and loan, credit union, mutual fund company, and/or stockbroker.
- **Financial planning programs from NEA and AFT**
Members of MEA-MFT are eligible to participate in a variety of excellent competitive investment plans and money saving programs sponsored by our two national affiliates, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). See

the web links below when you are considering investments, insurance, travel, supplemental health care, credit accounts, home loans, life planning, and money management.

- www.aft.org/benefits/
- www.neamb.com
- All of the programs offered by these national organizations are affordable, dependable, and designed with educators in mind.