

Five Strategies to Enhance Your Substitute Teaching

By Jeanie Gresham, John Donihoo, and Tanisha Cox

From *Kappa Delta Pi Record*

Skillful substitute teachers are critical to student achievement, especially in today's high-stakes accountability environment. Because teachers are absent from duty, some for short periods of time and others for lengthy time frames, schools may find it difficult to meet high academic and accountability standards without prepared substitute teachers. Furthermore, with the implementation of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), school districts strive to ensure that all teachers—including substitutes—are highly qualified.

Substitute teachers can ensure student success and enhance the substituting experience by implementing the five effective strategies described here.

Strategy One: Survey the Landscape

Getting to know your territory is vital. After you are hired by a district as a substitute teacher, obtain a list of the campuses you may serve, directions to those campuses, and the names of the campus principals. Contact each principal to schedule an on-site visit. The visit will allow you to investigate the campus and verify that it is

a place you want to work, as well as provide the principal with an opportunity to become acquainted with you. Principals are more likely to contact someone who has exhibited initiative and the desire to learn about their campuses.

When you visit the principal, remember to dress professionally. Blue jeans, loud prints, and casual clothes are inappropriate attire when you want to make a good first

impression. Ask the principal for the school schedule, a school map, names of people to go to for help such as the nurse or librarian, and campus emergency information. The campus discipline policy and, if possible, each teacher's discipline plan and daily schedule are important documents you want to retrieve.

Provide the principal with your schedule. Let him or her know when you are available and your areas of teaching expertise. Additionally, inquire about what the principal expects from you.

In a positive manner, also familiarize the principal with what you expect from him or her. Having a mutual understanding lays the foundation for success. Furthermore, it is a good idea to ask for a tour of the campus. The principal may not have the time, but someone else may be eager to show you around.

After your site visit, organize the documents you obtained so that they are easily accessed when you are contacted to teach. After you survey the landscape and orient yourself, setting the stage for success on your first day with students is the next imperative.

Strategy Two: Set the Stage for Success

Set the stage for success by preparing mentally and physically. Many times, you are given short notice. However, if you are contacted far enough in advance, review campus documents that you

retrieved from the principal: management plan, map, contact names, emergency plans, and teacher's classroom management plan and daily schedule.

On the morning that you are to report for duty, arrive early. Locate your room, scout out materials that are left for you by the classroom teacher, and organize the room for your students. Post the assignments for the day in a visible location. You are setting the stage to indicate that this is a business-as-usual day.

After the room is prepared, move to the front of the room to greet students as they enter. Model courteous behavior: smile, greet them positively, and even consider shaking their hands as they enter the room. You are modeling respectful behavior; students learn as much from what you do as from what you say. Your stage is set for high behavioral expectations.

Strategy Three: Set High Behavioral Expectations

Setting high behavioral expectations begins with you. Just as you dress professionally to meet the campus principal, you want to dress professionally on school days. You gain respect from students beginning with your appearance. Wear clean, pressed clothes that convey to students a professional image.

After you greet your students and they are settled in their desks or work areas, take time to engage

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in dialogue. Ask the students to share the expectations they have of you for the day. Next, ask them to describe what they think you require of them. This dialogue leads seamlessly into a discussion of the guidelines for behavior.

If you have a classroom management plan from the teacher, review this plan and allow students to explain each of the classroom rules. If no plan exists, it is mandatory for you to set the rules for the day. Usually, five clearly written rules are more than enough. An acceptable rule distinctly states the behavior you expect. An example is: Complete all assignments on time and with quality. A rule is specific, yet applies to many situations. After the rules are verbalized, post them in a visible location. Consider having students sign the posted rules, conveying an overt commitment to follow them. With older students, you may opt to type the rules and pass out copies for students to sign and keep in their possession.

In addition to your five rules, you vocalize the consequences and rewards for the day. Consequences are events that occur if someone does not follow one of the stated rules. Some examples of consequences are: one, a verbal reminder; two, a nonverbal reminder; and three, a time out. Remember, consequences should be reasonable and logical.

Along with consequences, you

voice rewards. Rewards are positive consequences that occur if students follow the class rules. Rewards preferably are academic in nature: five extra minutes of math games, walking tours around the campus to locate different types of leaves, or extra time for a story read aloud. Now, your expectations are set; you are on your way to managing with confidence.

Strategy Four: Manage with Confidence

The hard work comes in skillfully orchestrating your classroom. The work is manageable if you deliver clear and specific directions, praise along the way, and levy consequences and rewards consistently.

Give clear and specific directions. At times, teachers state multiple directions and expect students to follow them exactly. For many students, multiple directions are overwhelming. When giving directions, state one command at a time, allow students to implement the command, and move to the next command. Following is an example of a method for administering clear, specific directions.

The teacher desires the students to stand, form working groups of four, read pages 10-15 in their textbook, and write a summary statement. The teacher says:

1. "Students, please stand up behind your chair with your social studies textbook.

2. Go.

3. Look about the room, and locate three other people to work on a project.

4. Go.

5. Groups, locate a place to work.

6. Go.

7. Read pages 10-15, and write a group summary statement paraphrasing the content in your text.

8. Go."

Praise along the way. As you administer directions, scan the room to locate at least two individuals who have complied. Praise these students specifically. For example, when you have asked the students to take out their social studies book for a lesson, say something like, "Mary, you did a great job preparing for our lesson. Your book is out on your desk. You are ready to go." You will be astonished at how many students will shuffle to comply after this praise is announced.

Praise another student; then quickly scan the room to see who has not complied. Next, administer your consequences. If your first consequence was a verbal reminder, calmly move to a non-compliant student, and quietly remind him or her of the violated rule. Be discreet. It is not your objective to embarrass the student; you just want to obtain his or her attention. If the behavior escalates, calmly apply the second consequence. If the child persists, quietly ask that he or she go to time out, if that was your third consequence. When the student completes the time out,

have a short chat with the student and ask the following questions:

1. What did you do?

2. What should you have done?

3. What will you do next time?

4. What will happen next time if you do not follow directions?

These questions allow students to reflect on their behavior and to connect their behavior with consequences.

Levy consequences and rewards consistently. More significant than consequences in a classroom discipline plan are rewards—positive consequences earned by the class. At the beginning of the day, determine the end reward that is the goal for the day and the time of day that the class may obtain the reward. Set expectations for the end or ultimate reward.

For example, you may set 20 tally marks as the goal for the class to achieve by a certain time. You reward behavior with posted tally marks as students follow directions. You are in charge. You sporadically reward students during the day. Keep them on their toes; they should not know when you will administer tally marks.

Use rewards to assist in encouraging students to exhibit respectful school behavior. At the appointed time, you and the class count the tally marks to see whether they have obtained the ultimate or end goal. If so, reward the class. Consistency in orchestrating classroom management sets the goal of

high standards for behavior, just as preparing for the unexpected helps to keep you aligned with the main focus of your day—instruction.

Strategy Five:

Prepare for the Unexpected

Ideally, the teacher will leave you detailed, explicit lesson plans that outline the content and activities you are to teach. However, that is not always the case. At times, you walk into classrooms where nothing is prepared. To prevent loss of precious instructional time, always have emergency lesson ideas ready that are appropriate for a wide range of learners and grade levels. As you know, you may be contacted on the spur of the moment to substitute and may move to another campus and grade level the following day.

Sponge activities (short assignments designed to produce learning when the teacher is occupied), transition activities (quick tasks that gain student attention and focus them on the task at hand), literature, and graphic organizers may prove to be useful emergency tools. A good teaching practice is to begin and end instructional segments with transitions and fill time gaps with sponge activities.

An example of a sponge activity is, "Write all you know about . . ." Numerous Web sites offer a wide array of transitions and sponge activities. To find more information on sponge activities, go to a search engine, such as Google, and type in


"sponge activities" or "transition activities" to retrieve helpful ideas.

In addition, bring a variety of literature books. Many children's literature titles are appropriate for prekindergarten through grade 12 learners. *The Wolf's Story: What Really Happened to Little Red Riding Hood* by Toby Forward and Izhar Cohen offers a great example about distinguishing the point of view in a story, which is a skill that can be reinforced at all grade levels.

Furthermore, familiarize yourself with graphic organizers that assist in reinforcing content. For example, if you walk into a classroom and notice that the Civil War is a topic of study, a Venn diagram is a perfect tool to reinforce learning. Students can compare and contrast the reasons for the war according to the people in the North versus the people in the South.

Take advantage of Web sites that provide explicit instructions for using graphic organizers. edHelper.com provides an overview of the definition of graphic organizer as well as examples. You can fill a day with worthwhile lessons, when at first glance the day seems lost.

Closing Thoughts

Though, at times, substitute teaching may seem overwhelming, it can be very rewarding. Each instructional day must count for students. Enrich your teaching experience by implementing strategies to ensure success. 

Engineering a Blueprint for Success

By Scott J. Cech

From *Education Week*

AMID the clicking of computer mice and muted consultation, Wheaton High School teacher Marcus Lee's class of eleventh and twelfth graders pored over the electronic blueprint for a four-story building they were designing on their desktops. The calculations for each floor needed to be set just right if the structure was to stand on its own.

"What we want to do is lay a foundation," Lee explained. He was addressing the students in his civil-engineering and architecture class but could just as well have been talking about the goal of his school's Academy of Engineering—and that of Project Lead the Way (PLTW), the national curriculum it uses.

Often referred to by its acronym, PLTW is a rigorous four-year program of honors-level math and science, plus engineering, culminating in at least precalculus and advanced science classes, along with an intensive, hands-on collaborative engineering project. The curriculum is produced by Project Lead the Way Inc., a 10-year-old, Clifton Park, NY-based nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing the number of American college students who study and ultimately work in engineering fields.

The program has swiftly grown to include about 2,200 schools in 49 states. Last school year, 175,000 students were enrolled in PLTW classes nationwide. ▶

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“What you expect is what you get”

You are the teacher, and you must set the expectation.

When communicating your expectations for students' work and behavior, be

- direct
- specific
- concrete
- clear
- consistent
- tenacious

When students don't engage, try the following techniques:

1. turn off the lights
2. use proximity to quell chatter or off-task behavior
3. get involved in the activity
4. be a “broken record”
5. talk about behavior being a choice
6. conference in the hall to avoid confrontation
7. refer student to administration

Other helpful tips:

- avoid confrontation
- enable choice when possible
- follow through
- inform the teacher