

# The First Week

## Establishing Positive Colleague Relationships

Your relationships with other educators and administrators are important to your success the first year. It's well worth the effort to meet and get to know the other adults at your school.



- **Introduce yourself to colleagues.** Other educators can help you greatly in your first weeks. Get acquainted not only with other teachers, counselors and media specialists, but also educational support professionals such as secretaries, education assistants, custodians, security, transportation, and food service and health workers.
- **Ask veteran teachers for their advice and insights.** Be willing to admit you have a lot to learn from experienced teachers.
- **Find a mentor.** If you're not assigned a mentor or your assigned mentor isn't a good match, seek out an informal mentor or ask your administrator to help you find one.
- **Be a good team player.** Make sure you share and collaborate. Plan ahead so you can coordinate your activities with other teachers' schedules.
- **Accept the need to take on non-instructional duties,** but learn to say "no" graciously if you're becoming overwhelmed with responsibilities.
- **Watch your words.** Steer clear of gossip and negative talk. Be cautious when you are angry. It's difficult to rebuild relationships once angry words are spoken.
- **Communicate with your principal.** Take the initiative to schedule a time when you can meet with your principal. Invite him or her to visit your classroom and give you constructive feedback. Listen carefully and respond to suggestions in a professional manner.
- **Get acquainted with your local association.** Find out whom to go to with questions about your contract and your rights on the job—usually it's your building representative or local president. Get involved in activities of your local to help build a professional support system.
- **Say thanks** to those who help and support you.

## Building a Team with Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals are part of the instructional team. A good working relationship between teacher and para will benefit not only the two of you, but students as well.

Here are some tips for building an effective team.

- **Be respectful.** The paraprofessional is a valued member of the classroom team. If he or she is not performing the job correctly, be upfront about it, but be professional. Never use destructive criticism or put-downs. Don't assume you know what the para is thinking.
- **Get to know each other.** Schedule time when you can talk about your backgrounds, goals and approaches to different situations. You might find that your interests and skills complement each other.
- **Clarify expectations.** Tell the para what you want to achieve with your class. Have a clear and open conversation about the tasks you will do and the tasks that will be done by the para. Provide guidance, but give the para some flexibility in how to accomplish tasks.
- **Communicate.** Touch base with the para every day if possible, but at least once a week, particularly when it comes to goals for students. The para might spend more time with some students than you can, so listen to his or her insights and be open to suggestions.
- **Share materials with the para.** Share copies of lesson plans and any professional development materials you receive. This will help all members of the classroom team share responsibility to adopt and support the mission and strategies being implemented in the classroom.
- **Seek feedback regularly.** Ask the para if you are meeting frequently enough and providing clear guidance. Ask if your job roles are defined clearly. Does the para feel overburdened or underutilized? What areas need improvement?
- **Compliment.** If the para is doing a good job, let him or her know you appreciate it.
- **Celebrate.** You are both important in your students' education, so take time to congratulate each other on your successes.