

Six Tasks of the First Days and Weeks of School: Creating a Foundation for Learning

Set up and maintain physical space

- Design space to convey messages of inclusion and belonging for students.
- Use images and materials that serve as positive “windows” (views of other groups) and “mirrors” (views of self.)
- Involve students and their voice in setting up and maintaining classroom space.
- Identify what information would be helpful to post (e.g., bell schedule, weekly events, prompts for learning.)

Build classroom community

- Establish meaningful relationships with students, among students and with their families.
- Guide students to craft vision statements for themselves as a group of learners. EX: “This year we will encourage each other to be persistent, get unstuck, and see different perspectives.” Post and refer to it when students display or support those thinking behaviors. Prompts for students: *Who are we as a group of learners? What will that look like? What will we do to support each other?*
- Incorporate students’ strengths, skills and goals for the future into the classroom.

Establish routines and procedures that foster interdependence and cooperation

What teachers do consistently in the first few weeks easily becomes routine.

- Establish routines that help students learn with and from their peers.
- Plan routines for varied structures (e.g., partners, small groups, individual)
- Create daily routines for maintaining the classroom space (e.g., clean up)
- Use a “warm demander” stance, combining personal warmth with a firmness focused on excellence and academic effort. (See *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond.)

Pre-assess prior knowledge and skills

- Provide ways for students to show and share what’s important to them.
- Avoid surveys that might be perceived as invading privacy.
- Invite families to share the strengths and skills they see in their child.

Engage all students in real learning

- Engage students in the first days in relevant, real NEW learning so that they believe they CAN and WILL learn in your classroom.

Build in time for you and students to reflect

- Regularly ask students to reflect on their learning. Questions for students: *What helped you learn this week? What was hard? What do you need? How can I (teacher) help you*
- Ask yourself what helped you learn, what was hard, and what you need.