31 Tips to Thrive in Your First Days of School
TABLE OF CONTENTS

13 Ways to Beat Your First Day Jitters ................................................................................................. 1

31 Tips to Thrive in Your First Days of School .................................................................................. 2

1st Day Activities for Elementary and Secondary Education ............................................................ 3

Tips for Teaching in a Virtual Environment .......................................................................................... 4

Your Rights ........................................................................................................................................... 5

NEA/NEA-NM Resources ..................................................................................................................... 6

Upcoming NEA-NM Professional Development Opportunities ........................................................ 7

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INFECTIOUS DISEASE PREVENTION ADVICE

Practice Safe Hygiene

• Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.

• Make frequent use of an alcohol based hand sanitizer.

• Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

• Avoid close contact with people (e.g. hugging, handshaking, kissing, etc.)

• Cover your cough/sneeze with a tissue and throw it away immediately.

• Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces (keyboards, cell phones, desk, etc.)

• Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care. Call ahead for advice before visiting your doctor.
Getting Started

Getting off to a positive start sets the tone for a successful year—and career. You may be experiencing some stage fright, which is only natural. The suggestions in this guide are guaranteed to help this year and for years to come.

13 Ways to Beat Your 1st Day Jitters

You’re a classroom teacher — with your own classroom!

Your classroom is part of a major enterprise — hundreds or even thousands of individuals engaged in teaching and learning in buildings scattered across a city, town or region. To be efficient, effective and in control of a classroom, you must be able to navigate the system.

The place to start is your SCHOOL BUILDING. Visit your building and learn as much as possible about: the layout, the location of your classroom, storage areas, work areas, fire exits, lounge, cafeteria, gymnasium, auditorium, rest rooms, offices, phones, media center, computer facilities, guidance office, and nurse’s office.

FIND OUT WHERE. Familiarize yourself with the building. Locate the exits, the principal’s office, the gym, the nurse’s office, the cafeteria, the supply room, the faculty lounge, media center, and so forth.

KNOW THE RULES. Get acquainted beforehand with school policies and procedures such as opening and closing hours, attendance procedures, fire drill regulations, lunchroom regulations, etc. Set up a notebook to hold official notices, policies, and schedules.

INTRODUCE YOURSELF. Meet the teachers around you. They can be really helpful in the first few weeks of school. Take time to say “hello” to other important people: the librarians, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, office workers, and custodians.

DECORATE YOUR ROOM. Make sure your classroom is friendly and livable for opening day.

USE TRADITIONAL SEATING. Start with the traditional arrangement of desks until you’ve established control and know your students’ names. Keep traffic patterns in mind when arranging desks, work areas, etc.

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE ALL MATERIALS you’ll need for getting school under way: paper, pencils, books. Obtain blank forms such as hall passes. Test your equipment to make sure it works. If you are a floating teacher, prepare a means of moving materials from room to room.

STORE SUPPLIES. Go through the storage and filing cabinets and decide where to store things to which the students will have access and things to which only you will have access.

SCHEDULE YOUR TIME. Make a detailed schedule for the first few days, including times for each subject, rest room and lunch breaks, etc.

PLAN, PLAN, PLAN. Create lesson plans for the first few days. Plan at least twice as much you think you can cover. Write down everything. Detailed plans will provide you a feeling of security when facing the class for the first time.

GET THERE EARLY. On the first morning, arrive early so you will have time to ask any last-minute questions, go over final plans and relax before the students come in.

GREET YOUR PUPILS. Be in your room when the pupils arrive. Have your name written on the board. Greet the students with a smile and a pleasant “Good Morning.” Encourage them to be seated and remain so.

GO OVER THE RULES. Introduce your students to your classroom rules and regulations the first day. Cover things like: getting books and materials, sharpening pencils, entering and leaving the room, and so forth.

START THE LEARNING. Make the first day of school a real one. Accomplish some constructive learning with your students. A good start yields big dividends later on.
31 Tips to Thrive in Your First Days of School

Make your life easier by learning school procedures early

1. **Build Relationships.** Get to know the school secretary, custodian, education assistants, and security. They know the school, the students, and the neighborhood, and they can help you.

2. **Foster Open Communication.** Get comfortable talking with your principal, department heads, and team leaders. If you plan to do anything new or unusual this year, make certain you mention it to your principal in advance.

3. **Get Involved.** Participate in school activities and staff functions.

4. **Introduce Yourself.** Share things about yourself with students and staff. You never know when a student or coworker may find he or she has something in common with a teacher and is able to strike up a relationship that could be a positive learning experience.

5. **Respect Experience/Retain your Voice and Vision.** Be willing to listen to the experience of veteran educators and be willing to share your new ideas.

6. **Cheat Sheet.** Create an easily accessible list of people to contact and places to go for classroom supplies, resources, making copies, purchase orders, etc.

7. **Respect Your Own Time.** Set the hours you’re willing to work before and after school. Be sure to have scheduled down time.

8. **Get Organized.** Organize your personal papers. You never know when you may have to produce a document related to your job.

9. **Check School Policy.** If you intend to be teaching subject matter that borders on controversy, be sure you are within board policy. Keep your personal views on religion and politics to yourself.

10. **Keep Records.** Set aside a place for keeping receipts of expenditures that could be deductions on your income tax—classroom materials, professional books, and so on.

11. **Create Collaborative Norms.** If you want discipline to work during the year, start off by establishing class rules (no more than five) right at the beginning. Let the students help develop and establish the rules. They will be more likely to follow them. The rules should be posted in the classroom.

12. **Play “The Name Game.”** One way to get everyone, including you, to know everyone else in the room quickly is to play “The Name Game.” The first person in row one says, “I’m John.” The second person says “That’s John and I’m Mary.” The third person says, “That’s John and Mary and I’m Susan.” Continue around the room.

13. **Set a Class Goal.** Working together toward a goal—such as a holiday project to help a needy family, a class trip, or a class party at the end of the year—can help develop class spirit. Start your planning early in the fall to build enthusiasm.

14. **Develop Resources.** Develop your own sources of information and your resource list. Know where to get help when you need it. For example: How might you deal with a lack of instructional materials offered by the district? One way is to keep your eyes open for free and inexpensive materials such as those published in the education publications you receive.

15. **Do Your Best.** Do your best with what you have where you are.

16. **Appreciate the Small Things.** Give yourself a lift by focusing on the positive—the student who tells you that he or she learned something for the first week of school or the child who speaks to you in the parking lot and uses your correct name.

17. **Make Room for Joy!** Celebrate accomplishments no matter how big or small.

18. **Be Realistic.** You’re not going to hit it out of the ballpark every day and that’s okay.

19. **Be Reflective.** Take time to think about what worked that day and what could be improved. Ask yourself Why and How?

20. **Be Prepared for Diversity.** Use differentiated instruction to meet the needs of your students. Seek expertise when needed.

21. **Think About Health.** Make sure you are following all precautions to keep yourself, your students, and coworkers safe.

22. **Be Familiar with IEPs and 504 plans.** Identify students with special needs and familiarize yourself with accommodations and modifications to best support them.

23. **Find a Shoulder.** Look for a colleague to turn to for special advice or simply to unburden yourself about a specific classroom challenge.

24. **Get Parents Involved.** Determine how you will involve parents in your students’ education during the coming year. Is there any special way to approach parent-teacher conferences? Are there any particular messages you want to send home to parents? How will you deal with parents who want to help their children learn?

25. **Communicate with Parents.** Send a note home early in the year to introduce yourself. If you teach primary grades, explain to parents that you need time to get to know pupils before you can comment on them. Let parents know that you are available, and list the process and times for getting in touch with you. If you teach upper grades, include your policy on homework.

26. **Plan Lessons.** Get to know your required lesson plan format, your scope, and sequence.

27. **Make a Good First Impression.** Whatever else you do, give the class the impression from the beginning that you are well organized. Your students must feel that you are prepared and know what you are doing.

28. **Create a Positive Classroom Culture.** From the first day forward, you can help your students decide whether school is drudgery or a serious undertaking that can be both rewarding and enjoyable. If you give the impression that being in class is a chore for you, that attitude will be reflected in your students. Send a positive note home with every student at some time during the week. Catch the kids being good.

29. **Know your Rights.** Read of re-read your contract so that you know your rights.

30. **Support your Association.** Join your local education association for the moral support of people who understand the difficulty of your job.

31. **Remember the 3 Qualities of Good Teaching.** Be flexible, be patient, and keep your sense of humor.
1st Day Activities

Elementary:

- Greet the students at the door as they come in and give them name tags that are easy to read and affix. Allow them to choose desks, then tape an identical name tag to the desk.
- Explain procedures for entering the room each morning: where to hang coats, when to be in their seats, how much conversation is permissible.
- Tell how you will start each day, then have them do it.
- Describe how the lunch count, attendance, and other daily tasks will be handled.
- Read the specific rules for behavior along with consequences and rewards. Point out where they are listed.
- Give students a tour of the room and show them materials they may use.
- Establish a specific location for daily schedules, homework assignments and reminders of events and deadlines.
- Discuss and outline the basis on which students’ grades are determined.
- Schedule a rest room break early in the morning the first day.
- Explain what students should do if they finish their work early.
- If you plan an activity period, demonstrate the procedures for getting out materials and putting them away.
- Tell your class what is about to happen before they leave for physical education, lunch, or other outside activities. Tell younger students how you want them to line up and have them practice.
- Vary activities and the pace of lessons every day.
- Use take-home folders to distribute notices to parents.
- Reserve the last 15-20 minutes the first day to clean up and review what has been covered.
- Explain procedures for dismissal and bus loading. Bus loading is confusing and buses must leave at scheduled times.

Secondary:

- Stand at the door to greet students.
- Introduce yourself, including your background and special interests in your subject.
- Hand out any notices from the school office and have students complete any forms that are required by the school.
- Outline your procedures for recording attendance and tardiness, giving assignments, collecting papers, make-up work, and hall passes.
- Post rules for classroom behavior.
- Establish a uniform heading for papers.
- Discuss and outline the basis on which students’ grades are determined.
- Tell the class your objectives for the week and for the year.
- Allow a short period of time for each class to ask questions about what is expected of them and about any of the procedures that you have established.
- Under certain circumstances, it is wise to extend the privileges. The teacher allows certain behavior that is normally forbidden, but at the same time makes it clear just how far they will let it go.
Tips for Teaching in a Virtual Environment

Simplicity is essential
Every teacher knows what it’s like to explain new instructions to their students. It usually starts with a whole group walk-through, followed by an endless stream of questions from students to clarify next steps. While this process can be frustrating at times, students can always rely on each other and the teacher in the room when they’re stuck.

Establish a digital home base
In the spirit of simplicity, it’s vital to have a digital home base for your students. This can be a district-provided learning management system like Canvas or Google Classrooms, or it can be a self-created class website. I recommend Google Sites as a simple, easy-to-set-up platform. You need a single digital platform that your students can always visit for the most recent and up-to-date information. Simplicity and familiarity are invaluable. Students need to feel comfortable going to the same place to access the same tools. The farther away you are from your students, the more important it is to cultivate stability and practice norms.

Communication with students and families is key
For many students and parents, virtual learning is a new landscape. Thus, it’s important to educate them on the digital tools needed for success. Provide tutorials up front and schedule run-throughs with each student with a family member to help assist younger primary students. Furthermore, making sure each student has access to a digital device is a fairly obvious but important virtual teaching tip. If students share devices with siblings or other school-age household members, try to ensure that class times differ so that your students can use their devices when they need them.

Compile common resources with your colleagues
Work together with your grade level or subject team as much as possible or even team teach.

Take breaks!
Using any online platform for 45 minutes at a time can be hard on the eyes and mind. Taking screen-free brain breaks can help.

Use gamification/contests
Find ways to make learning fun through weekly challenges, contests and games. Some learning apps include built-in factors of gamification to enhance student participation and motivation. For example, video game-inspired achievements and badges in the Sora reading app reward students for reaching specific milestones.

Create accessibility for all
Create universal supports for students who don’t like making videos or are shy. Some students may thrive using Zoom chat but are less successful using Zoom video or Flipgrid. Allow for all types of sharing based on modality of the student.

Encourage collaboration and digital citizenship
Virtual teaching can expand the ability of educators to shine as they help students learn how to effectively collaborate online and become good digital citizens.

Be Joyful
Lastly, have fun! If students see their teachers laughing, moving, singing or dancing, they’ll do the same!
Resources

NEA-NM/NEA Member Rights Do Make a Difference:

- **DO** keep school related conversations professional and confidential.
- **DO** be aware of the Professional Practices and Standards Commission Code of Ethics. **DO** consult an association representative and/or UniServ Director for advice and assistance immediately if you have questions or concerns about a situation.
- **DO** keep a log of notable work events.
- **DO** know your negotiated agreement and board policies.
- **DO** respond to both good and bad evaluation comments.
- **DO** develop and post a classroom discipline procedure (in conjunction with official school policies) and use it equitably.
- **DO** examine your personnel file annually (take a witness with you). **DO** keep lines of communication open between you, colleagues and the administration.
- **DO** Document, document, document!
- **DO NOT** discuss a serious situation with the administration or publicly without representation or before consulting your UniServ Director.
- **DO NOT** ignore critical comments of any kind by an administrator or board member.
- **DO NOT** take any parental complaint lightly. Do Not use force to control students unless absolutely necessary to protect the student, others, or yourself from harm. Use the minimum reasonable force to control the situation.
- **DO NOT** resign or make a deal before consulting your UniServ Director or NEA NM/ NEA legal counsel.
- **DO NOT** hire your own attorney before contacting NEA NM/ NEA for legal services unless you are prepared to pay the entire bill.
- **DO NOT** administer medication or medical treatment except with written approval from a parent or guardian and after proper training within state and local rules and regulations or in emergency situations.
- **DO NOT** EXPECT THE ADMINISTRATION TO FULLY PROTECT AND DEFEND YOU and never believe you can’t be replaced.

You should call your UniServ Director when...

- A student is injured or a serious student disciplinary incident occurs. **•** an evaluation includes a plan of assistance or any statements like “…needs improvement…”
- You receive any form of verbal or written reprimand, warning, or suspension.
- You are directed to appear before the administration or board regarding any aspect of your employment status, a complaint or incident. **•** you appear to be singled-out for extra evaluations or close observation.
- You receive a notice of nonrenewal.
- It appears that local, state or national laws or regulations are being violated.

Your Rights
NEA Micro-Credentials:
Micro-credentials are an on-demand, personalized learning experience. Earning a micro-credential is based on demonstrating competency, as opposed to spending seat time. NEA offers over 100 micro-credentials free of charge to members. Topics range from classroom management to bullying to ELL strategies. Start an account at nea.certificationbank.com. NEA-NM offers support in forming a professional learning community to support educators seeking microcredentials. To start or join a PLC, contact: isanchez@neanm.org

EdJustice:
EdJustice engages and mobilizes activists in the fight for racial, social, and economic justice in public education. Find timely coverage of social justice issues in education and ways you can advocate for our students, our schools, and our communities. neaedjustice.org

EdSupport:
SupportEd.nea.org is a leading voice for educators, providing the essential tools, resources and support to help you as an educator. It delivers the best professional support and development opportunities, articles, and events from the NEA universe.

Member Benefits:
Build a better life with NEA-NM/NEA Member Benefits. By negotiating with America's largest companies, we've saved NEA-NM/NEA members like you more than $10 million. Our programs and services deliver the recognition you deserve. Learn more at neamb.com/discover. And if you have any questions, don't hesitate to call 1-800-637-4636.

California Casualty:
Remains the preferred and trusted auto & home insurance provider for member and employee groups across the country. We protect the men and women who strengthen and enhance the quality of life in communities across America: Educators, Higher Ed Employees, Nurses, and Public Safety Professionals.

Works4Me:
Practical classroom tips from teachers like you! The free Works4Me weekly e-newsletter brings you practical classroom tips written by teachers, for teachers. Each week you'll receive other teachers' best ideas on classroom management, teaching techniques, curriculum content, peer & student relationships and more. The Works4Me Web site contains more than 1,800 tips that have appeared in the newsletter over the last 10+ years. The Works4Me online discussion board will connect you with other educators and give you a place to get answers to your everyday classroom dilemmas and help other educators solve their own problems. For more information, please go to www.nea.org/works4me.

NEA-NM:
Your Professional Organization representing instructional staff and Educational support professionals for NM's Public Schools employees. The NEA-NM website is a great place to get updated information on current events and resources for educators around the state. Contact us through the website www.nea-nm.org, or by calling 505-982-1916.
NEA New Mexico’s Professional Development Opportunities are the perfect way to enhance your Profession Practice and fulfill the PED requirements for your evaluation. See our upcoming member trainings below:

**A Closer Look at Distance Learning Weekly Webinars:**
We will be hosting a weekly webinar focusing on specific tools you can use to support Distance Learning. The first in this series will focus on Tools to enhance your own teaching skills. Future weekly webinars will look into various ways to support students with distance learning including hands on support for students that may not have Internet access. To register for these events click here.

**Parent Engagement:** (October)
Learn how to effectively engage parents at parent-teacher conferences and through development of communication streams to enhance the learning of your students and the understanding of your parents.

**Classroom Management:** (January)
Identify current management strategies that could be improved for the second semester and learn methods and techniques to enhance classroom management in the second semester.

**Cultural Awareness:** (March-April)
Learn ways to incorporate cultural awareness and sensitivity into the classroom. Celebrate the various cultures of your students by familiarizing yourself with activities, lessons, and events that can be both in-person and digital.

**Teacher Evaluation Domain Training:** (Ongoing, setup locally with UniServ Directors and Presidents)
This 2 to 4 hour training covers the four domains, which comprises 50% of a teacher’s evaluation. Participants are given two working binders to keep track of documents and artifacts, which provide evidence of mastery of the four domains and 22 subdomains.

Complete our form and we will contact you when PD opportunity is finalized. https://fd10.formdesk.com/NEA-NM/pd_development