
A New School Year – Tips for Teachers

By Shawnta S. Barnes – August 9, 2017



Summer vacations are a time for teachers to relax, attend professional development, and prepare for the upcoming school year. Summer should also be a time of reflection to identify what changes to make to ensure the upcoming school year is better than the last. Here are five tips for teachers returning to the classroom this school year.

1. Put your cape away.

Times are hard and many educators teach students who live in poverty. Unfortunately, some teachers are not prepared or equipped with the skills to support these students. They come riding into the classroom on a white

horse wearing a cape with lofty dreams of snatching these poor children out of their situations. They become so overwhelmed with details of their students' lives, they lose focus. They lower standards and expectations because their life is hard. Instead of feeling sorry for students, the best action an educator can take is to improve him/herself as an educator and learn how to teach students using trauma-informed best practices. An educator with high expectations and a well-managed classroom is an educator who can truly, 'save the day' and help change the trajectory of child's future.

2. Build strong relationships.

The root of most dysfunction in classrooms is poor relationships. A strong relationship with a child is an important lever a teacher can use to his or her advantage to help a student. There are students who will be in class with one teacher and have no problems, but once they are with another teacher, there is chaos. This is because the teacher did not take the time to get to know his or her students and build a safe and positive community in his or her classroom. When I was teaching in a secondary school, I would have my students participate in classroom connections every week. These were activities that helped us get to know each other. It helped my students bond with each other and with me. When I switched to elementary, I participated in morning meetings, a time for students to gather typically in a circle to have a discussion and share their feelings, in various classrooms. The teachers who consistently had morning meetings had fewer classroom issues than teachers who did not.

3. Apply professional development.

It is important not to let those fancy binders we receive during professional development collect dust on a shelf or cabinet in our classroom. When I attend professional development (yes, even the mandatory ones I would not have chosen to attend otherwise), I try to identify something I could use in my classroom. As an educator, it is not only important for our students to grow, but we should also grow as professionals. We should not be the same teacher we were years ago.

4. Support new and struggling teachers.

Early on in my career, I was only worried about what was taking place within the four walls of my classroom. I decided I didn't have time to help other educators. The reality was I had the wrong attitude. Helping out your colleagues ultimately helps students in your building, whether that is being willing to listen to concerns, staying after to plan lessons, or giving classroom management suggestions. Once I shifted my mindset to helping all students, it was easy for me to help my colleagues.

5. Attend school events.

Teachers should attend school events. Yes, you can abide strictly by the hours of your contract; it is your right. Depending on the stage of your life, it may be the best balance for your work and personal life. When I had my twin boys and returned back to work, I rarely attended any extra events unless it was mandatory. Now, that my boys are older, I make an effort to attend events throughout the school year. Sometimes, my husband and boys will attend with me. It shows students you care about them and it is another opportunity to strengthen your relationship.

This school year is my 12th year as an educator. I hope once this year ends, I can look back and say I improved as an educator and made a difference.