



NASET Classroom Management Series

Series I-Step-by-Step Guide to Setting up Your Classroom

NASET's *Step-by-Step Guide to Setting up Your Classroom* is the first in a new series of Classroom Management articles aimed at providing you with very practical advice on a variety of topics faced by special educators every day. The *Step-by-Step Guide to Setting Up Your Classroom* will provide new teachers with practical guidelines for beginning the school year as a special education teacher, and experienced teachers with supportive information which may help improve their classroom.

There are a variety of settings in which you may be hired in the field of special education including a **resource room, self-contained special class or an inclusion setting**. This article, which will be presented in several parts over the next few weeks, focuses on various steps that should be taken to insure the welfare of the children, the appropriate educational setting, information that should be gathered, communicating with related service providers, parents, paraprofessionals, assistant teachers, and other areas to make your job easier and more rewarding. This article assumes nothing and provides important information for all three settings. When noted, certain information is best suited for a specific type of setting. If not noted, then assume that the information being presented applies to all three settings.

Part I-What to do Before the Start of School

The best advice in preparing for a new school year is to begin as early as possible. There are many things that you can do before the start of school that will facilitate your experience and make the school year more productive for you and your students. The first day of school should not be the first day you learn about your students. This would be a major mistake and will inevitably make classroom management more difficult.

Step I-Learn as much about the students as possible before school begins

The very first step in setting up the room actually involves getting to know the students that will be in your classroom before the first day of school. It is imperative that you find out as much information about each student as possible, so that you are fully prepared when he/she walks in the room for the first time. You will be amazed about the wealth of available materials on each child if you know where to look. The only exception to this may be a new student to the school from another city or state where materials may not have yet arrived. If this is the case, there are several things you can still do which we will discuss later. When working with students with disabilities, information on the child can be found in the following possible places:

- *Number and types of schools attended:* You should be able to ascertain this information by the school names on the report cards found in the permanent folder. For some children with disabilities, this may be their first year in a mainstreamed school. They may require added attention and support in the transition.
- *Medical records:* This information can be gathered from the school nurse's office. Pay close attention to vision and hearing levels, medications, allergies, and any other medical issues that might need attention in the classroom.
- *Permanent record folder:* This folder should contain all the basic information on the child i.e. phone, address, parent's names, date of birth, sibling's names and ages. It is usually stored in the main office.
- *Past teachers' reports:* These items may be among those found in the permanent record folder or may be part of the child's report card forms.
- *Past report cards:* These items may present you with patterns of performance in many academic areas, including both strengths and areas of concern. These should also be contained in the permanent record folder.
- *Group achievement scores:* These materials, if accurate, can also provide a pattern of strengths and areas in need of improvement. However, be very careful about drawing any conclusions from low scores unless other information backs up your impressions, e.g., classroom performance, teachers' reports. Sometimes children who are experiencing academic problems may not try as hard as possible for fear of failure. Consequently, the resulting scores may not reflect true achievement levels.

➤ *IEP*: A very crucial piece of information is the child's most recent Individual Educational Program. Keep in mind that since the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 there have been any changes to the IEP. However, in general, the IEP will contain the following statements:

- *Present levels of achievement and educational performance.* This statement describes how your student is currently doing in school. This includes how your student's disability affects his or her involvement and progress in the general curriculum.
- *Annual goals.* The IEP must state annual goals for your student, meaning what you and the school team think he or she can reasonably accomplish in a year. The goals must relate to meeting the needs that result from your student's disability. They must also help your students be involved in and progress in the general curriculum.
- *Special education and related services to be provided.* The IEP must list the special education and related services to be provided to your students. This includes supplementary aids and services (such as a communication device). It also includes changes to the program or supports for school personnel that will be provided for your students.
- *Participation with nondisabled students.* How much of the school day will your student be educated separately from nondisabled students or not participate in extracurricular or other nonacademic activities such as lunch or clubs? The IEP must include an explanation that answers this question.
- *Participation in state and district-wide assessments.* Your state and district probably give tests of student achievement in certain grades or age groups. In order to participate in these tests, your students may need individual modifications or changes in how the tests are administered. The IEP team must decide what modifications your student needs and list them in the IEP. If your students will not be taking these tests, the IEP must include a statement as to why the tests are not appropriate for your students and how your students will be tested instead.
- *Dates and location.* The IEP must state (a) *when* services and modifications will begin; (b) *how often* they will be provided; (c) *where* they will be provided; and (d) *how long* they will last.
- *Transition goals and services.* No later than when your students are 16, the IEP must include measurable postsecondary goals related to training, education, employment, and (when appropriate) independent living skills. Also included are the transition services needed to help your students reach those goals, including what your students should study.
- *Measuring progress.* The IEP must state how school personnel will measure your student's progress toward the annual goals. It must also state how parents will be informed regularly of their child's progress and whether that progress is enough to enable your student to achieve his or her goals by the end of the year.

- You will need to become very familiar with all the changes under the new law since you will be involved in writing the child's new IEP at this year's Annual Review. For more information on the changes in the IEP under IDEA 2004 go to:
 1. <http://staffweb.esc12.net/~epate/documents/SWEPCD/Legally%20Defensive%20IEP%20%20-%20Elena%20Gallegos/IEP%20IDEA%202004.pdf>
 2. <http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/iep.index.htm>
 3. http://www.house.gov/ed_workforce/issues/109th/education/idea/ideafaq.pdf

- This vital information necessary for learning about your students is usually not found in the permanent record folder. It can normally be obtained from several sources including:
 - a-The office of Pupil Personnel Services/Special Education Office
 - b-The psychologist's file on the child
 - c-The special education folder on the child. This file is normally passed from teacher to teacher. However this folder may be in a main file in the office of the special education coordinator for your building.

- *Health alerts:* This piece of medical information may be found on the front page of the child's IEP. If something is noted, then it becomes your professional responsibility to learn as much as possible on that health condition. You want to understand the child's health issues, as well as sound knowledgeable when speaking with parents about these issues. While you are not a medical professional, it is recommended that you find out as much as possible about the condition so that you sound professional and prepared when you meet with the parent. It will be very reassuring to parents when they see that you have an understanding of any conditions that their children may be facing.

- *Classification:* Find out as much as possible about the child's specific disability classification as you can. You may already be knowledgeable about the disability but it never hurts to learn more. This knowledge base can only gain you respect from staff and parents. Numerous sources on all of the different disability categories can be found on the NASET website

- *Modifications:* Modifications are adjustments to the child's classroom or test requirements that try to level the "playing field" with his/her nondisabled peers. Examples of modifications may be extended time when taking tests, taking tests in a smaller, less noisy environment,

questions read, and answering questions in the test booklet rather than an answer sheet. Look for the classroom and test modifications that the child is entitled to have. These are listed somewhere in the IEP. Investigate each modification thoroughly, and fully understand what is involved and the possible reasons as to the rationale for why these were deemed appropriate. You will need to fully understand these modifications since you will very likely be communicating and explaining them to the child's other teachers.

- *Accommodations:* There may be times when a child is entitled to some classroom accommodation. Examples of these include special furniture, filters for lighting, acoustic enhancements etc. Again investigate and become knowledgeable of each accommodation. The list of accommodations for each student should be clearly described in the IEP.
- *Related services:* The IEP will also contain a section on the related services that the child is entitled to have while in school. The term related services means transportation, and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services (including speech-language pathology and audiology services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, including therapeutic recreation, social work services, counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling, orientation and mobility services, and medical services, except that such medical services shall be for diagnostic and evaluation purposes only) as may be required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education, and includes early identification and assessment of disabling conditions in children. (20 U.S.C. Section 1401(22))
- *Assistive technology:* When looking at your student's IEP you may notice that some of them are entitled to assistive technology. Assistive technology devices are mechanical aids which substitute for or enhance the function of some physical or mental ability that is impaired. Assistive technology can be anything homemade, purchased off the shelf, modified, or commercially available which is used to help an individual perform some task of daily living. The term assistive technology encompasses a broad range of devices from "low tech" (e.g., pencil grips, splints, paper stabilizers) to "high tech" (e.g., computers, voice synthesizers, Braille readers). These devices include the entire range of supportive tools and equipment from adapted spoons to wheelchairs and computer systems for environmental control. It will be your responsibility to learn as much as possible about this assistive technology device for each student. A good start in understanding the basics of assistive technology can be found at the University of Buffalo site: <http://atto.buffalo.edu/>

➤ *Ability levels:* It is important to determine, if possible, the child’s present levels of academic, social and intellectual ability. These levels, which are measured by many sources, can usually be found in several areas:

a-the permanent record folder: look for a group IQ test, or a test that offers a score labeled “School Abilities Index.” These group measures may offer you some insight. Again, be careful of using low scores to determine ability for the same reasons as mentioned previously.

b-the psychologist’s office: look up the last triennial report which should have some measure of ability noted. The triennial evaluation is the evaluation on a child with a disability that is done every three years. The main purpose of the triennial evaluation is to measure the child’s present levels and determine whether the conditions that were used in the original classification are still present.

c-The child’s IEP: the IEP may contain an ability level. The child’s ability level is usually measured through individual ability tests like the Wechsler Scales of Intelligence or the Stanford Binet Test of Intelligence. The ability levels may be reported in ranges i.e. average, above average, or in specific scores i.e. 112, 85. Therefore you should become familiar with IQ ranges and within what ranges specific scores may fall. The following table may help you in understanding this issue:

IQ SCORE	PERCENTILE	DESCRIPTION
160 - 169 150 - 159 140 - 149	0.03 0.2 1.1	VERY SUPERIOR
130 - 139 120 - 129	3.1 8.2	SUPERIOR
110-119	18.1	HIGH AVERAGE
100 - 109 90 - 99	23.5 23.0	NORMAL OR AVERAGE
80 - 89	14.5	LOW AVERAGE
70 - 79	5.6	BORDERLINE DEFECTIVE

60 - 69	2.0	MENTALLY DEFECTIVE
50 - 59	0.4	
40 - 49	0.2	
30 - 39	0.03	

d- Past teachers' comments about the child's ability levels. Past teacher comments can tell you a great deal about patterns of strengths and weaknesses, and a history of certain behaviors and academic skill problems. These may be found on past report cards. If they are not you may want to contact some of the child's past teachers to gather information.

These points should offer you a very good beginning in learning as much as possible about your students before school begins. Experience has shown us that the more groundwork you do before school begins the easier the transition will be for your students and parents.

The next part will deal with meeting parents and students before school, meeting with assistant teachers, paraprofessionals, related service providers, classroom teachers and other professional staff members that will be involved with your students.

Copyright © 2006 by National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASSET) All rights reserved