

# Section 1:

## CREATING THE CLIMATE FOR LEARNING

Your classroom is more than a physical space. It can be a community of learners, but you must build it with intention. A supportive classroom community thrives when four conditions are in place:

1. It is student-centered.
2. It promotes the social and psychological growth of children and youth.
3. It is organized for learning.
4. It pairs high expectations with supportive practices.



*You recreate a climate for learning every day, not just during the first week of school. It begins at the classroom door.*

*This is prime time for you, and it sets the tone daily for your students. Be there every day to greet students by name, with a warm tone of voice and a smile. Have your classroom space organized for students before they arrive so that you aren't distracted by the logistics of preparation.*

*The fact that you prioritize greeting them carries the message that this is a student-centered place. And keep your classroom neat and organized, as it signals to students that you care about the environment in which they are learning.*



1.1: Welcome to Section 1  
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***How Do I ...***

**FOSTER A  
WELCOMING  
ENVIRONMENT?**

**A welcoming learning environment is crucial for the success of students (and you!).**

A welcoming classroom climate is one where students feel a sense of belonging, acceptance of who they are as individuals, and an *esprit de corps* where there is a collective sense of identity, fellowship, and pride. You are the orchestra leader who can make this happen.



## MYTH BUSTERS

- FALSE** Students automatically trust the teacher. After all, you know more than they do, and that should be enough.
- FALSE** Just stick to the prescribed curriculum. There's no reason to personalize it for your students.
- FALSE** Don't smile before the winter break.

# A Welcoming Environment BEGINS WITH RELATIONSHIPS

**Have you stepped into a new environment and immediately felt a positive energy? A welcoming environment signals that this is a place where confidence and curiosity are fostered.**

A student-centered classroom exudes a positive energy. You don't have to spend lots of money on expensive decorations. You do need to be intentional about the ways you are investing in the climate of the classroom.



**Learn every student's name.** A person's name is central to their identity. For younger students, you can start the school year by having desks and cubbies labeled with students' names to form immediate associations in your mind. You can use a silent interview with older students such that they introduce one another to the class. They interview a partner by writing questions to the other person and trading papers to answer the questions. After several minutes, the students introduce their partner to the rest of the class.

**Learn how to pronounce names correctly.** If a name is unfamiliar to you, ask the student how to pronounce it correctly. Ask them not to let you off the hook until you can say it properly, even if it takes a few days.



**Learn about their interests.** Use getting-to-know-you games and interest surveys to learn more about students. Incorporate what you have learned into lessons. Don't limit connections to academic content. Ask a student who skateboards about the latest trick they are working on. Consult a student who loves video games about recommendations for a gift you want to give to a relative in your family.



**Make sure they get to know you.** Share developmentally appropriate information about you, your interests, and your goals. Seek connections, including similarities and differences, between your life and the lives of your students.



# A Welcoming Environment IS BUILT ON TRUST



Teacher-student relationships form the bedrock of learning, and your trustworthiness is at the heart of positive relationships. Your words, attention, and actions can build the trust students have in you. These are the six messages you want to convey each day:

I  
ACCEPT  
YOU.

I  
AM PAYING  
ATTENTION.

ADULTS  
ARE  
HELPERS.

I  
AM HERE  
FOR YOU.

I'LL  
BE HERE  
WHEN TIMES  
ARE TOUGH.

YOU  
ARE SAFE  
WITH ME.

**BE** consistent

**Be consistent in your demeanor.** We all have frustrating mornings, bad days, and long-term concerns about our lives. But we can't let these spill over into the classroom. Students need you to maintain an optimistic outlook about them. Make sure the ways you react to the ups and downs of the learning day do not vary wildly depending on your mood.

**BE** open

**Be open.** Student suggestions, questions, and challenges are great feedback to you about what's working and what's not. Show students that you are flexible and open to their ideas.

**BE** Reliable

**Be reliable.** Make sure that you keep your promises. If students are expecting a science demonstration or a trip to the local library, follow through.

**BE** Apologetic

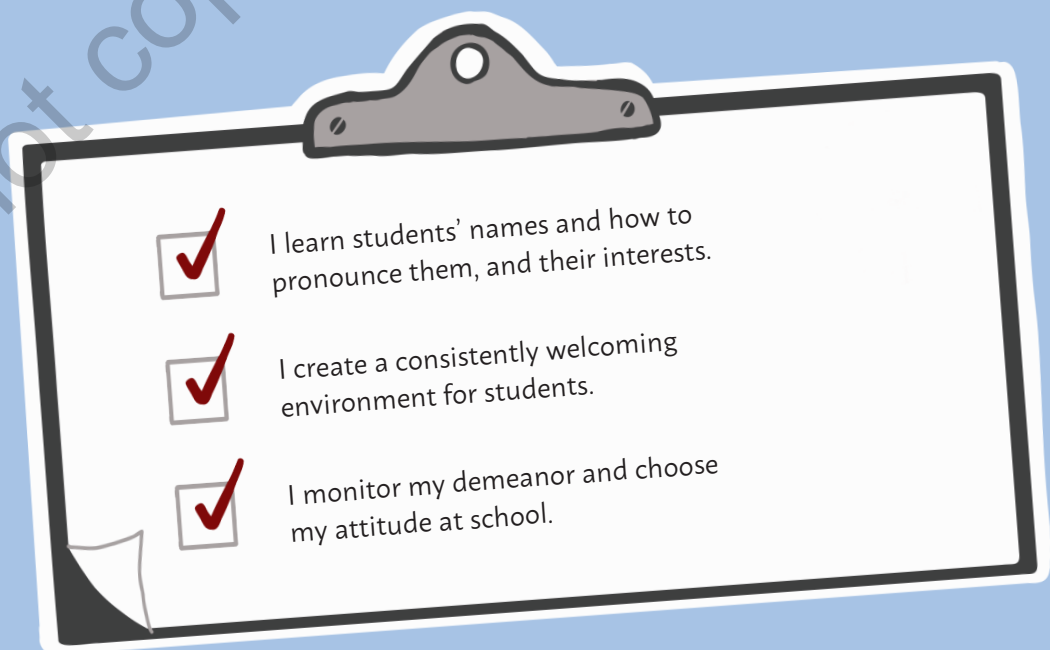
**Apologize when you make mistakes.** Relationships are repaired when people own up to their errors. It shouldn't matter that they are younger than you.



# ELEVATE YOUR PRACTICE

Interest surveys are a great way to get to know students. Use them periodically throughout the year, as student interests change. Don't forget to learn about the interests of new students who join you later in the school year. Here are ten questions you can ask to learn more about them!

1. ***What's your favorite subject in school? Why?***
2. ***What's your least favorite school subject? Why is that?***
3. ***When are you the happiest?***
4. ***What is your favorite time of day?***
5. ***What are three words or phrases that describe you best?***
6. ***What do people ask you for help with?***
7. ***When do you sometimes need help?***
8. ***What topics do you hope we get to read and talk about this year?***
9. ***Finish this sentence: I hope this class is \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.***
10. ***What are three things I should know about you?***



# A WELCOMING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

NOTES

Do not copy, post, or distribute

***How Do I ...***

**CREATE A SENSE  
OF COMMUNITY IN  
THE CLASSROOM?**



**A student-centered classroom thrives on beliefs about belonging and a sense of ownership in the classroom.**

These are key to self-determination<sup>1</sup> and contribute to students' well-being and motivation to learn.



### AUTONOMY

**Autonomy** to make choices and decisions, which contributes to the belief that you can achieve goals



### COMPETENCE

**Competence** to demonstrate skills and develop new ones



### RELATEDNESS

**Relatedness** to others through social bonding such that one doesn't feel alone



### MYTH BUSTERS

**FALSE**

Students do better when teachers make all the decisions.

**FALSE**

Class meetings and other class cohesion activities take time away from real learning.

**FALSE**

Belonging is important for young children but less so for adolescents.

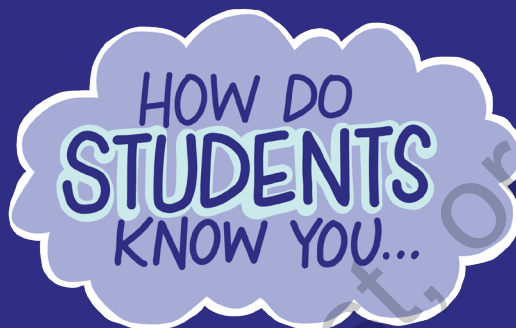
# Foster a SENSE OF BELONGING EVERY DAY

People are better able to learn when they feel a sense of belonging: that they are valued, respected, and connected to others. A sense of belonging is an amplifier of achievement and includes<sup>2</sup>

- **Teacher empathy:** Understanding
- **Unconditional positive regard:** Warmth
- **Genuineness:** The teacher's self-awareness

- **Nondirectivity:** Student-initiated and student-regulated activities
- **Encouragement of critical thinking** as opposed to a traditional memory emphasis

These student-centered practices are essential at any age. Establishing these conditions begins with the first interactions students have with the teacher and continues throughout the school year.



## TEACHER EMPATHY

*How will your students feel connected with you?*

- Begin lessons with a positive affirmation (e.g., favorite quotes, a silly joke, a thought-provoking question).
- Establish time for students to drop in for academic support.
- Contact families regularly to talk about their student's successes.



CARE ABOUT THEM AS PEOPLE?



## UNCONDITIONAL POSITIVE REGARD

*How will your students know you care about them as people?*

- Weave into lessons what you have learned about students' interests.
- Use materials that reflect the assets your students bring to the classroom.
- Use voice feedback tools on student work so they can hear the sparkle in your voice, rather than read your words without context.

# HOW DO STUDENTS KNOW YOU...

## GENUINENESS

*How will your students know you care about yourself as a professional?*

- Dress and groom professionally.
- Project a demeanor that is optimistic about them and you.
- Make it clear in words and actions that this is a place for learning about themselves, the world, and each other.



*HOLD THEIR ABILITIES IN HIGH REGARD?*



## NONDIRECTIVITY

*How will your students know you hold their abilities in high regard?*

- Hold individual conversations with students to help them identify their strengths, goals, and growth areas.
- Ask questions that mediate the student's thinking, rather than ask leading questions.
- Use shared decision-making about curriculum with students.

## ENCOURAGEMENT OF CRITICAL THINKING

*How will your students know you respect them intellectually?*

- Foster discussion among peers using questions that open up their thinking.
- Include opportunities in every lesson for students to write about, illustrate, or discuss their thinking with peers.
- Build choice and relevance into assignments and projects.



# Foster STUDENT OWNERSHIP OF THE CLASSROOM

**Students need to feel a sense of ownership in the classroom. By this we mean that they have a voice in decisions about how the classroom operates.**

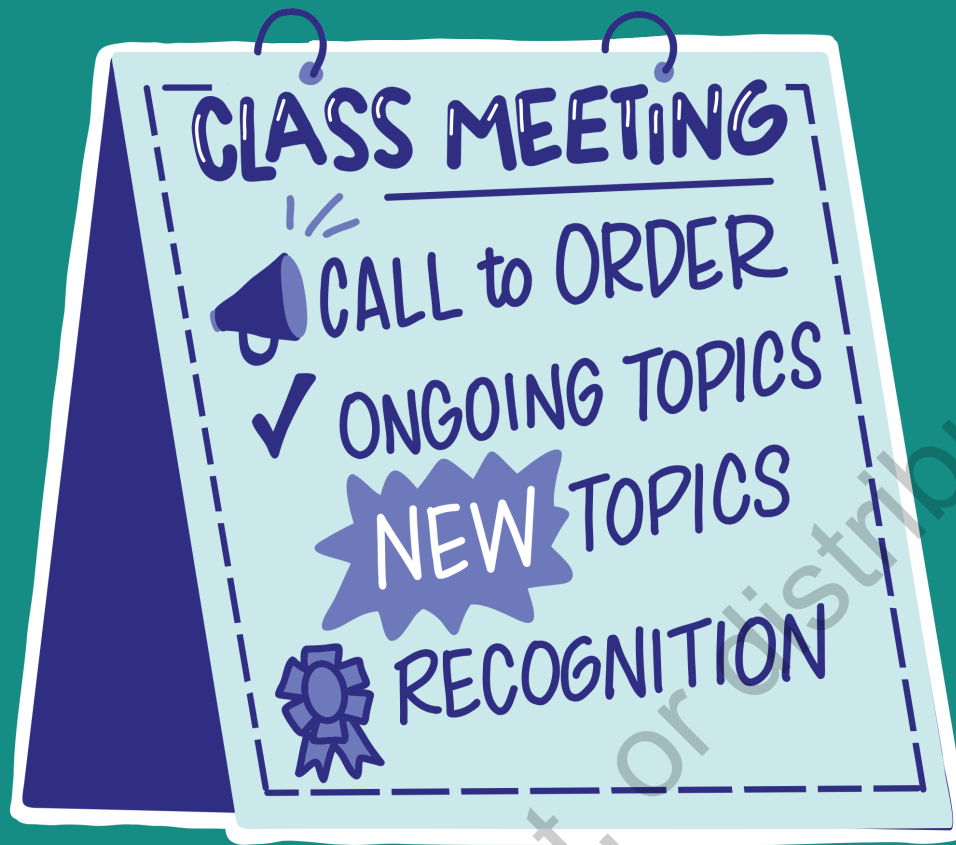
As the teacher, consider that many of the decisions reside with you, such as scheduling and maintaining student safety. But wise teachers look for opportunities to build student voice in the classroom. In doing so, they strengthen the social fabric of the classroom community.

Communities of all kinds have ways of coming together to meet, talk, and reconnect. Classrooms are no different in their need to do this. Class meetings are a way to set aside time to take care of one another, make decisions, and build a sense of ownership in what occurs throughout the day.

Class meetings should be scheduled at regular intervals to build the habit of the community coming together. These are short (no more than 15 minutes) and are focused on attending to the business of the classroom community.

Preschool and primary teachers often infuse class meeting elements into a larger daily morning routine. Middle and high school students can participate in class meetings once a week in a designated course or advisory period.





## FORMAT FOR CLASS MEETINGS

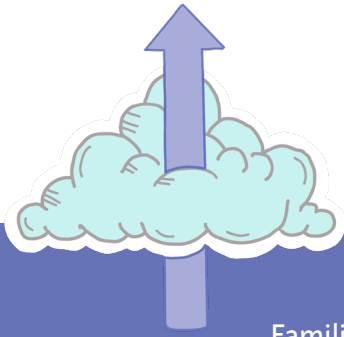
- **Call to order.** Start the meeting with a short greeting to one another (younger students) or a meaningful quote or question to discuss with a partner (“What is something you taught an older relative to do?”)
- **Ongoing topics.** Any topics from the previous class meeting that have not been resolved.
- **New topics.** These are nominated by students or the teacher. Keep a box that students can use for submitting topics. Remind them not to use the names of other students (“Mark talks too much”) but to describe the problem or event so that it can be discussed (“We need a better way to figure out how to listen when someone else is talking.”)
- **Recognition.** End the class meeting by inviting students to share compliments and thanks with other members of the class, as well as celebrations of success.



1.2: Class Meeting:  
Elementary



1.3: Class Meeting:  
Secondary  
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# ELEVATE YOUR PRACTICE

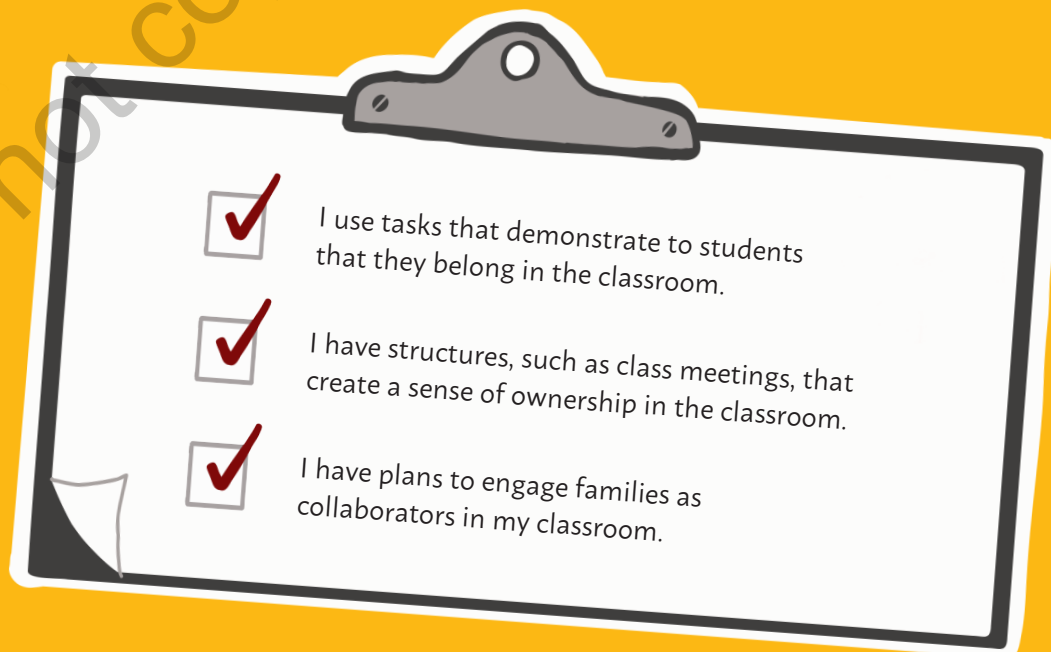
Families are valuable partners who enhance the learning climate of your classroom. Schools with high levels of teacher-parent trust and parent involvement in school decision-making outperform schools that do not.<sup>3</sup> Do your part by making your classroom a place where families are valued and welcomed.<sup>4</sup>

**Regular and proactive communication is key.** Make phone calls, send personal notes, and provide newsletters about classroom events.

**Create homework activities that involve families.** For instance, students learning about a historical event can interview a family member.

**Make learning opportunities known to families.** Not everyone can volunteer in the classroom. Let them know about other ways they can help, such as attending school events, talking about topics their child is learning, and sharing important family news with you.

**Encourage families to become involved with classroom decision-making and school governance.** Survey families regularly about their opinions and seek feedback from individuals about what is working well and what can be strengthened.



# A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

NOTES

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*How Do I...*

# **FOSTER A CLIMATE OF INCLUSIVITY?**



***A climate of inclusivity requires a multipronged approach that involves our own identities as teachers, understanding the identities of students, and linking this knowledge to the ways we teach and assess.***

1. We understand **who we are** as teachers by examining our values and identities. These affect our decisions about how and what we teach.
2. We consider **what we teach** about our content to ensure we are taking advantage of ways to build relationships.
3. We are cognizant of **who we teach** by seeking to understand the assets each person brings to the classroom.
4. We pay close attention to **how we teach** in order to understand what works best for each student. Importantly, we understand that there is no “one-size-fits-all” strategy.
5. We pair **how we assess** with knowledge of whom and what we teach to reveal each student’s demonstrations of what they have learned.<sup>5</sup>



## MYTH BUSTERS

**FALSE**

General education teachers aren't qualified to teach students with disabilities.

**FALSE**

A teacher needs to share the same language as a multilingual student if the student is going to learn.

**FALSE**

All students should be treated exactly the same. That's what's fair.

# *Make Your Classroom* **INCLUSIVE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**



**Inclusive practices allow students with disabilities (SWD) to access the academic content and the social environment of the school.**

Inclusive practices align with federal laws regarding the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities. By making relationships more accessible, educators ensure that SWD receive the highest level of education possible. Amplify your efforts to ensure that students with disabilities are not labeled and marginalized.

**Cultivate an inclusive attitude.** An inclusive attitude starts with knowing deeply that you are the teacher of all your students, not just the ones with or without identified disabilities.



**Talk with families about positive supports.** Families are the keepers of their child's history and a great source for learning what works well. Schedule an informal conference with a primary caregiver to learn about positive techniques and actions you can take to ensure success.

**Use inclusive language with students and colleagues.** Students with disabilities receive extra supports and services that will require you to work shoulder-to-shoulder with other colleagues. But when you start using the language of "my students" and "your students" you signal loud and clear that you have marginalized some of your students in your own classroom. If a student is scheduled for a pullout service, don't schedule the science demonstration, trip to the school garden, or other important event in your class's shared memory while that student is out of the room. This is another signal to classmates that some students just aren't that important.



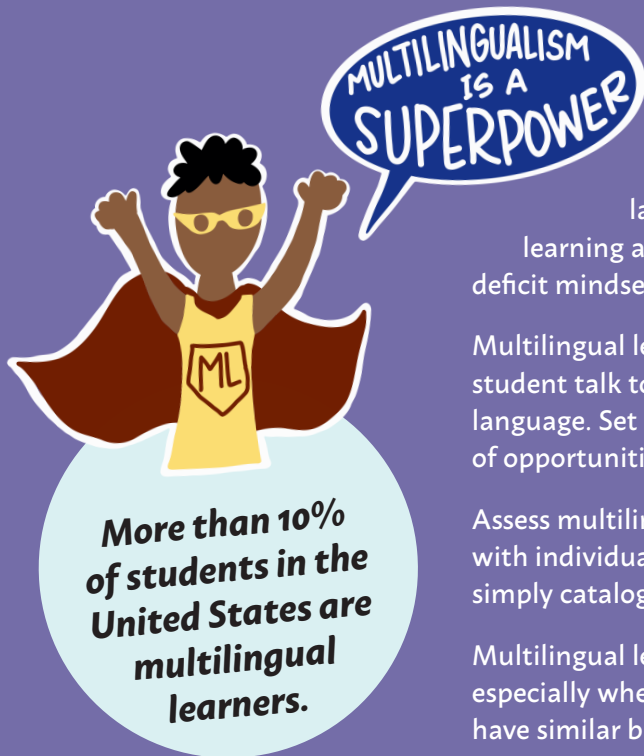
**Normalize disability in the classroom.** Use accessible technologies, including closed-captioned videos, accessible websites, and assistive digital tools. Seek books that feature people with disabilities in ways that show their strengths and gifts. Call out ableism in the same way you would racism and sexism.



### FUN FACT:

**The text-to-speech technology you use to send a quick message on your smartphone was originally developed for people with visual and print disabilities.**

# Make Your Classroom INCLUSIVE FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS



We use **multilingual learner** as a more contemporary designation for students who are adding English to their language and literacy skills. "Multilingual" rightly positions learning as an additive, whereas "English learner" can reinforce a deficit mindset that highlights what a student can't do.

Multilingual learners benefit from quality instruction that emphasizes student talk to give students lots of experiences using academic language. Set up your classroom environment so that students have lots of opportunities to interact with each other about the content.

Assess multilingual learners by balancing large-scale assessments with individualized, informal ones that highlight strengths and do not simply catalog deficits.<sup>6</sup>

Multilingual learners deserve supplemental and intensive interventions, especially when their performance pales in comparison with peers who have similar backgrounds and experiences.

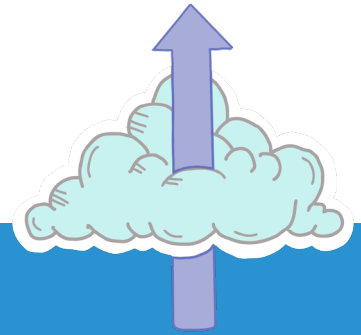


## ENRICH YOUR LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

- Recognize that multilingualism is a strength and will add value to your classroom.
- Provide scaffolds, such as language frames and word banks, for students to use.
- Learn common phrases in your students' heritage languages and use them. "Please" and "Thank you" go a long way.
- Learn about the communities around your school.
- Talk with families and community members about their recommendations for expanding your classroom library.



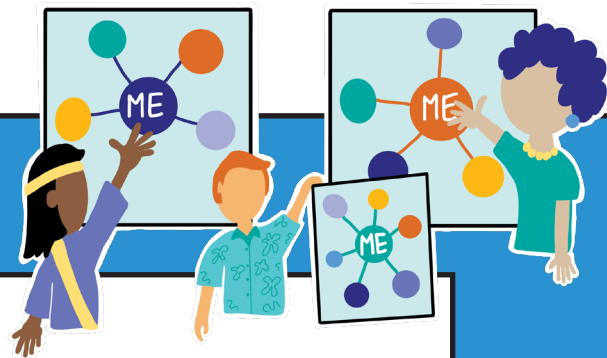
# ELEVATE YOUR PRACTICE



*Asset mapping is a student-generated visual representation of the cultural strengths and community resources they draw on.<sup>7</sup> Students use inquiry to discover stories about their families, identify individual strengths, and draw on the values and ideals of the community in which they live.*

## START WITH YOUR CULTURAL ASSETS MAP AND SHARE WITH STUDENTS

- *What are your cultural assets?*
- *What/who has helped you achieve your successes, and where did you get that help?*
- *Where do you go for support?*
- *What led you to become a teacher?*
- *What/who helps you grow and learn, and where do you get that help?*
- *What is your cultural history?*
- *What stories are a part of your culture?*



## HOST A GALLERY WALK

Encourage students to build posters or displays about what they have learned. Then host a gallery walk so that you and your students can learn more about one another. In the process, you will learn much about your students' strengths, and they will gain from this self-knowledge.

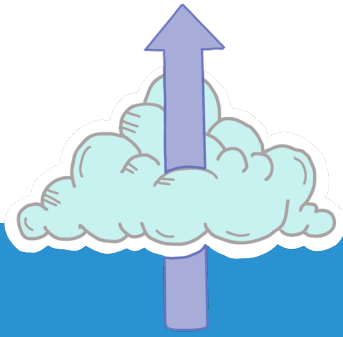
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1.4: Map Example:  
Elementary Student



1.5: Map Example:  
Secondary Student



# ELEVATE YOUR PRACTICE

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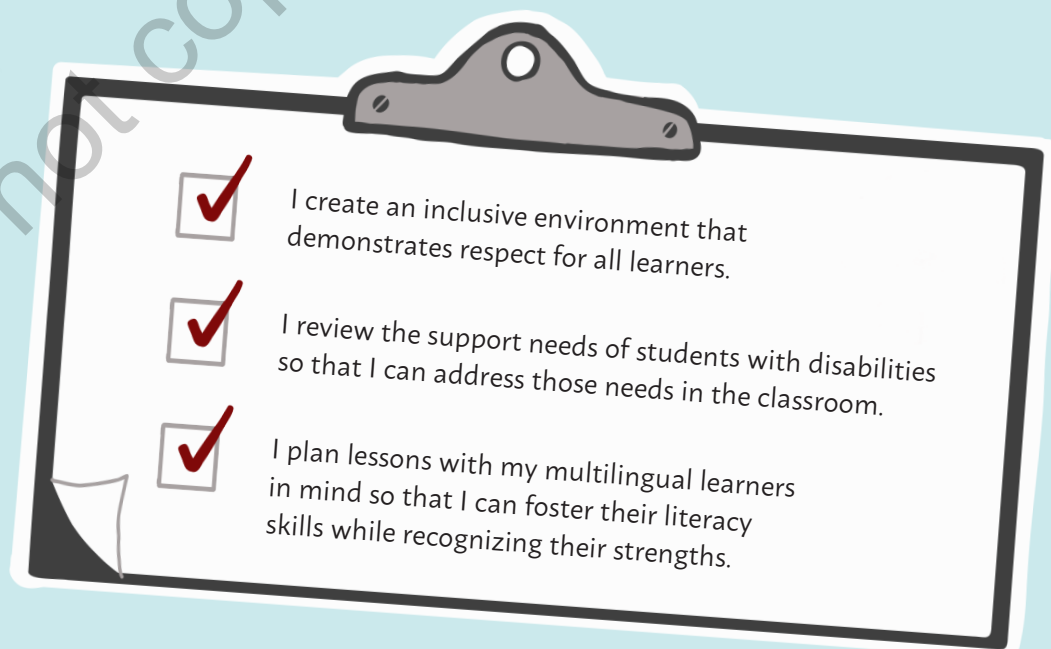


## INVITE STUDENTS TO EXPLORE THEIR CULTURAL ASSETS

Younger students will likely respond well to questions that encourage them to find out more about their family's history, develop timelines of their own life, and identify places and traditions that are important to them. Ask useful questions:

- **Who helps you?**
- **What do you know about your culture?**
- **Who can help you understand your culture?**
- **What traditions are important in your family?**
- **What traditions are important in your community?**

Older students can add more about historical experiences that have shaped their ancestors' lives, identify local community leaders and institutions they value, and report on their own advocacy and service.





*How Do I...*

**CREATE AN  
ORGANIZED LEARNING  
ENVIRONMENT?**



Effective classrooms are organized for learning. The routines and procedures are clear and efficient. Routines describe the daily or weekly systems that govern the learning day. Procedures operationalize those routines.



The physical environment communicates that the classroom is a place for learning, curiosity, and discovery. Students make judgments about you and themselves based on the organization of the environment. *Is it organized and neat? So is my teacher. Are there interesting items on display for me to use?* This is my classroom, and I belong here.

Don't make the mistake of decorating the classroom like you do your home. The classroom is for students and needs to be functional for their learning. Items on the walls should help students learn and should each serve a specific purpose.

An organized learning environment makes it possible for you to start students' day the right way. Be at the classroom door every day, greeting each one by name.



## MYTH BUSTERS

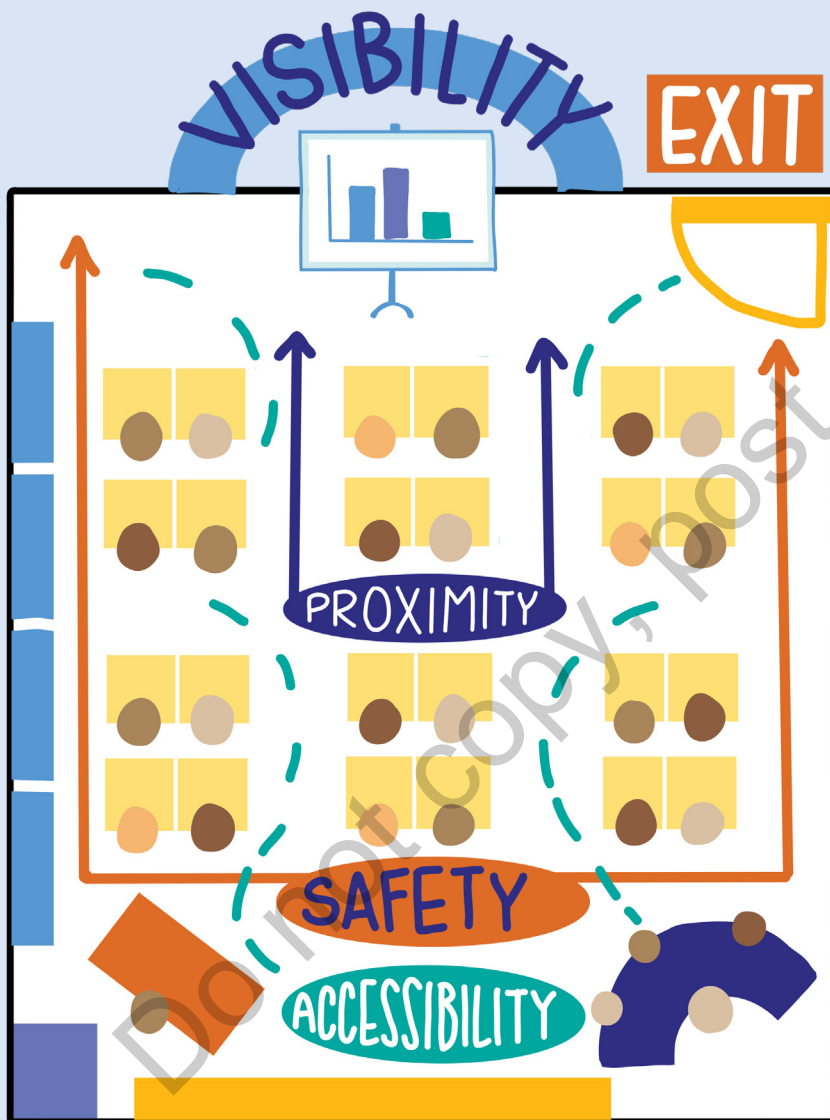
**FALSE** Students who have been to school in previous years already know how to work in your classroom.

**FALSE** Students don't mind clutter and disarray.

**FALSE** Class procedures have little impact on student engagement or learning.

# Organize THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Consider visibility, proximity, accessibility, and safety when arranging a classroom. Because each classroom is unique, the arrangement you decide on will be influenced by your academic needs and by student considerations. Keep in mind that students with disabilities may have learning needs that necessitate particular placement in the classroom to increase visibility or minimize distractions.



**Visibility.** Are there areas of the classroom where students cannot easily view the board or screen? If so, consider using these areas for other purposes, including small-group work or storage.

**Proximity.** Proximity is the physical distance between you and a student and is a useful tool for increasing student engagement. Look at the pathways for teacher movement in your classroom. Can you easily reach each student in the room to provide extra instructional or behavioral support? Can you circulate during whole-group teaching to monitor learning?

**Accessibility.** An orderly learning environment allows you and students to easily reach all areas of the classroom. Students need to throw away trash, enter and exit the room, and retrieve and store materials. How will this be accomplished in your room? When planning your room arrangement, consider patterns of movement in these high-traffic areas.

**Safety.** Above all, students must be safe in your classroom. All schools have specific requirements for maintaining unobstructed exits in case of fire. Be sure to consult these regulations when planning your room arrangement. Next, catalog the items that may pose a threat to student safety. Is there science lab equipment stored in your classroom? If so, this should be placed in a secure area.

# Organize With ROUTINES AND PROCEDURES

There is a saying that “well begun is half done.” Think through the daily and weekly routines that will assist you and your students in making the most of instructional time. Here are questions and advice to assist you in making decisions before the first day of school.



**How will you schedule learning?** Consult with your school leader or grade-level chair to learn about bell schedules, recess and lunch times, dismissal, and early release days. These will shape your daily schedule.

**TIP: Post a daily schedule in the same location each day so that students can anticipate transitions.**



**How will you take attendance?** Most schools use a digital platform to report absences and tardies.

Meet with the registrar or attendance clerk to learn about it. Then ask a colleague for advice about including this step in the workflow.

**TIP: Teach students the attendance procedure you devised. Younger students might place their names in a bowl when they arrive.**

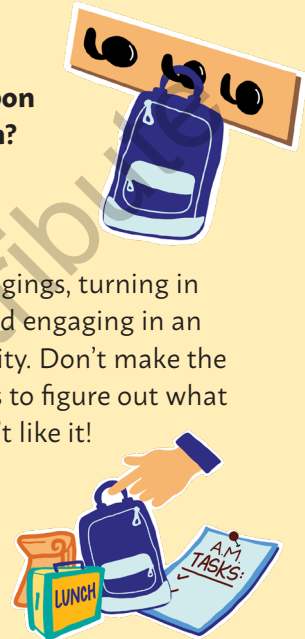
**Secondary students might check off their names. You will still need to do a visual accounting.**



**What will students do upon entry into your classroom?**

Consider what you want students to do when they arrive. This time is likely to include putting away belongings, turning in homework and projects, and engaging in an independent learning activity. Don't make the mistake of leaving students to figure out what to do, as you probably won't like it!

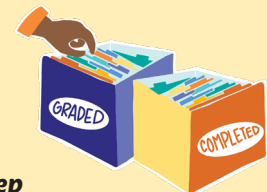
**TIP: Instruct students where their belongings should go (in a cubby, on the back of their chair). Make sure they know not to leave items in the aisle where they can be a tripping hazard. Post a task for them to complete upon entering the classroom while you take attendance.**



**How will you distribute and collect materials?**

Identify materials that students can retrieve on their own. Schedule time for yourself at the beginning or end of the day to set out specialized materials that will be needed for the next lesson, such as microscopes, calculators, or art supplies.

**TIP: Some assignments are submitted digitally, so demonstrate and practice naming conventions and submission procedures. To keep papers organized, set up two plastic file crates and label them Completed Work and Graded Work. Place a hanging file for each student, labeled with name and student number, in the file crates.**





**How will you manage technology?** Classrooms typically use rechargeable devices that need to be secured. Meet with instructional technology personnel to learn how these procedures are performed.

**TIP: Teach students the procedures for storing, recharging, and retrieving devices. Number classroom equipment so you can track what is being used and by whom. You may ask students to turn their screens toward you when you are giving directions or providing information.**



**How will you signal students?**

Determine how you will gain attention when the classroom is noisy as well as how you will call students back when they are quietly engaged in independent learning.



**TIP: Signals should be taught daily during the first week of school and reinforced frequently until students respond quickly and consistently. A consistent signal combines a verbal command with a hand gesture (for example, "Give me five..." while showing a decreasing number of fingers.) Use a timer to display the time left to complete an activity.**



**How will you call on students?** Don't rely on raised hands, as you will miss the majority of students who rarely, if ever, volunteer. Decide on how you will provide equitable response opportunities.

**TIP: Introduce, practice, and use a system for identifying which students you want to share.**



**How will you dismiss students?** Don't let the bell dismiss students; you do. Determine what your routine will be for the last five minutes of the class period or school day. This may include exit slips, cleanup, and reminders about homework and other announcements.

**TIP: Beginning on the first day, use the closing routine, including announcements, cleanup protocols, and reminders about tasks they need to complete.**

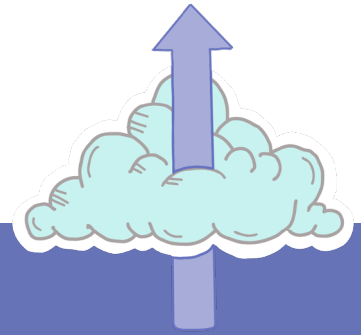


1.6: Attention Methods: Elementary



1.7: Closure Activities: Secondary resources.corwin.com/welcometoteaching

# ELEVATE YOUR PRACTICE



*When you and your students are organized, you minimize wasted time on transitions and maximize your instructional time. Use this checklist to consider how students will be organized.*

## STORAGE

- Use storage bins to hold markers, scissors, rulers, and other frequently used student materials.
- Create a designated place for students to turn in paper assignments and collect graded work. Secondary teachers should organize by class period.
- Teach elementary students how to keep their desks organized.
- Label everything!

## WALL AND BOARD SPACE

- Decide where you will post daily learning intentions and success criteria.
- Decide where you will post the lesson agenda.
- Keep a space on your board for you and students to work through lesson content.
- Reserve wall space for posting necessary items students will use (e.g., alphabet cards, periodic table of elements.) Make sure they are visible to all students.
- Section off wall space for displaying student work. Change frequently!



## SPECIALIZED LEARNING AREAS

- Set up space for you to meet with small groups and individual students.
- Create a quiet area for individual students to read and work. Minimize the number of items in this area.



## MAKING YOUR CLASSROOM MORE SUSTAINABLE

- Replace paper with dry-erase boards.
- Post assignments and materials on your learning management system whenever possible.
- Place materials that will be used across class periods in clear plastic holders to minimize the number of copies you will need.
- Teach how to use the recycling bin.
- Add indoor plants.



- I teach students the procedures I expect them to use in the classroom.
- I have an organized physical environment that provides me access to all students and ensures safety.
- I create an environment in which the walls help me teach.

# AN ORGANIZED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

NOTES



