

110

*Strategies
to Problem-Solve
the Hard Parts
of Teaching*

.....

the
new
teacher
handbook

BERIT GORDON

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introduction

Here are a few of the regrettable things I did as a brand-new teacher:

- I went out all night dancing with my coteachers in the Dominican Republic (my first full-time teaching job). Then, I napped for twenty minutes in the school parking lot, drank a coffee, and taught. Never again.
- I had favorites.
- I had students who, on awful days, I wished would get mono and be out for three weeks.
- As a new teacher in a New York City high school with 140 students (my second full-time teaching job), I “lost” a set of papers because I couldn’t handle grading them.
- I gave myself pep talks on the walk to work.
- I ugly cried on the walk home.
- I waited for the star teacher down the hall to leave, copied the lesson she had prepared on her board, and used it myself.
- I covered student writing in “constructive” comments and rationalized it because I used purple ink, not red. No one read them.
- I opted to be paid across ten months instead of twelve to make my rental deposit. I did not budget and was flat broke that summer.

As I write this book, I find myself “new” again—at a new school, teaching a new class. I dismissed my students twenty minutes early on the first day, and no one corrected me.

New teachers and their students can survive these mistakes when we learn from them and do better. What leads new teachers to leave is feeling so overwhelmed that they lose the energy to find answers and solve problems. This book equips new teachers with strategies to address inevitable challenges.

The goal is to end the day by saying, “I taught today!” Having more and more of those days is what fuels teachers. We feel good at teaching when we are good at teaching.

On the other days, we can say, “I learned today.” We catch what went wrong and find actionable steps to do better; those days aren’t so defeating.

There are many answers to the hard parts of teaching, but they’re not always rooted in what genuinely helps every kid, current research, or doable steps that keep teachers in teaching. Use this book to stay energized and in problem-solving mode.

You came here because you care about teaching and students. Those are the only nonnegotiable ingredients to being a wonderful, lifelong teacher. You can figure out the rest with support, kindness to yourself and others, and strategies to keep growing.

• Why do we need this book now?

The news is full of stories about teacher shortages, districts desperate to fill classrooms with qualified educators, and rising teacher burnout. While a teaching career can be rewarding, energizing, and lifelong, it can also be taxing, demoralizing, and brief. We need ways to keep you in teaching and feeling good while you’re there. You and your students deserve a happy teacher (or at least a reasonably content one, most days).

One of the best solutions for having teachers who feel good and are good at their jobs is more time. Teachers, especially new ones, need more time to plan, collaborate, grade, communicate, and reflect. There are pockets of schools making critical changes in that direction. However, teachers are often asked to do more with less time and fewer resources. What used to be two protected prep periods in a teaching day might now be one forty-two-minute period, often taken up by unpaid coverages, duties, professional committees, IEP meetings, and extra student support. Some of those help students. But they all come at a cost: teachers without the time, energy, or resources to do their job well.

Not only is there less time with more responsibilities, but there is also often less support for new teachers and their challenges, some of which weren't prevalent a decade or two ago. For example, more teachers are fast-tracked through alternative-route certification programs, which we desperately need. Still, that results in teachers building the plane while flying it. We may also see

- challenging student behaviors and high emotional needs;
- cell phones battling for students' attention;
- increased caregiver expectations, but not necessarily support;
- far more standardized assessments plus the expectation to use the data from those numerous assessments;
- complicated online curricula and learning platforms, often without training on how to use them or connect them to students; and
- less autonomy on what we teach and more evaluations on how we teach it.

I've worked with new teachers who are on the brink of exhaustion and mental health collapse. One teacher said he regularly thought about walking in front of a bus because it would mean not having to show up to work. Another lost a significant percentage of her body weight and had chunks of hair falling out because of stress. Many tell me they are depleted and defeated.

I've also worked with administrators who were frustrated by new hires' attempts to achieve a (needed) work-life balance by strictly adhering to contract hours or substituting devices for personalized instruction.

We need current frameworks and strategies that help new teachers enjoy teaching and become good at it without going through a hazing process, surviving their first years instead of thriving.

New teacher burnout isn't caused (only) by hard work. It comes from hard work that doesn't pay off. When teachers' efforts don't get students to work together, line up, read, or write, they feel defeated. Burnout (and new-job searches) creep in.

But what happens when we give new teachers proven strategies to manage their time and a class, connect with others who love teaching, get students to respect one another, plan well, and engage every learner? Those new teachers are energized—they get to more and more of those days when they can say, "I taught today!"

• How do I read this book?

This book contains tried-and-true, research-backed strategies to help you solve new teacher challenges. Each chapter is tied to a teaching goal, and within the chapter are strategies to help you meet that goal. Strategies are titled as questions from new teachers so you can find practical, easy-to-implement answers. The questions came from new teachers across the United States and Canada, so you'll be reminded that you're not alone—every new teacher faces challenges.

No need to read the handbook from cover to cover. New teachers don't have that time, and your biggest challenges might not be the same as those of the new teacher next to you. Dip into the book's strategies, choosing what you need.

Choose strategies based on what you have in place and what you're ready for next. Each chapter relates to a different teaching goal, and they all progress toward a solid first year and long-term success. You can start with any chapter, but the first ones (taking care of yourself, managing your time and a never-ending workload, getting routines and relationships in place) will set you up for more success with the goals later on (building connections with caregivers, fostering student independence, boosting talk and collaboration, assessment, and more).

• How do I know what goal or chapter to start with?

There is no right place to start, but you will set yourself up for the most success by using the checklists in this introduction to find the right goal and chapter for you (see pages 10–17). The items in the checklists will help you determine if those are things you want to work toward and, once you've tried strategies in that chapter, celebrate your progress as you check items off. If you can't check off items after trying a few strategies in a chapter, go back to a previous chapter to build up more of a foundation. The more strategies you try, the more items on the checklist you'll easily tick off.

Being a new teacher shouldn't feel like drowning in the unknowns. You deserve to feel like "I've got this." Each strategy is designed to get you one step closer.

When I see a strategy titled with one of my burning questions, how do I use that strategy to help me?

The **Coach/Admin support** sections are specifically designed for those who are helping new teachers along the way—from classroom management strategies to student engagement techniques. At its essence, this book shows teachers that when something isn't working, they can try something else! Here's where to find that something else, with guidance both for teachers and their mentors.

The **subtitle** will orient you, very briefly, on what's in this strategy. Then, you'll immediately get actionable steps on what to try. There's little fluff here—strategies dive into concrete moves that help you solve problems. The steps to take are laid out for you so you can see just what to do, bit by bit.

Those steps are sometimes outlined in an **At a glance** section. This is like when online writers summarize long articles in a TLDR (too long, didn't read) synopsis. Skim the At a glance section when you're rushed and need a quick answer. Later, check out the **Digging deeper** section for a longer explanation of what to do and why. The other strategies keep everything together in one section—you'll find all you need to know in a single read-through.

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2.4

Coach/Admin support

Spend more time on names with groups of new teachers than feels necessary. They have an onslaught of new information to track, and they will appreciate it when you repeat introductions. Plus, it will show you care that everyone knows one another's names, not just you.

In the classroom, lead an activity so the teacher can circulate and ask each student if they're saying their name correctly. Follow up after the first week to see if the teacher knows everyone's name. If not, ask how you can help. Make it a shared priority.

How important are names? And how do I learn them all?

Knowing everyone's name and pronouncing it correctly is a top priority. Practice lots.

I distinctly remember a teacher who confused my name with a classmate's all year. Unsurprisingly, I didn't work hard in that class. Mispronouncing students' names can go further—it can harm their well-being. Learning students' names—and pronouncing them correctly—is one of the first and most powerful ways we show students they matter in our classroom. And don't worry: I can't remember what I had for dinner last night, but I've learned how to remember everyone's name in a few days—it's possible.

At a glance

- * Learn students' names and pronouns as soon as possible, using the name they want to be called and saying it correctly. If you teach the same group across the day, try to learn them all within the first day or two. Give it a week or two if you teach multiple classes.
- * Have students practice and use everyone else's name.
- * Say names frequently and with warmth.

Digging deeper

Calling students what they want to be called is essential in establishing your classroom community. Memorizing names will pay off tenfold in management, relationship building, and creating a classroom community. Here are some ways to get there:

- Ask students to say their names like their family says them, and write them down phonetically in your notes. Add notes to your roster with details to help you remember.
- Access last year's yearbook to help memorize student faces and names.
- Use a seating chart until everyone knows everyone's names.

Want to know more?

My Name, My Identity website

In **Want to know more?** you'll find a reference to other resources that will help you learn more about this strategy and others like it.

These sections also acknowledge these educators for bringing us tried-and-true ideas.

The New Teacher Handbook

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- Have students create tent cards with what they like to be called on both sides so everyone can see. They can add a phonetic spelling.
- Have each student fill out an index card, and use these as flash cards as you're teaching to practice names. They should include
 1. Their name: what they like to be called (and any pronunciation help)
 2. Their (number seats so you all know where their assigned seat is)
 3. An identifying detail that won't change in the next few weeks (hairstyle, glasses, freckles)
 4. One thing they want you to know. (This is confidential; a few may use it to reveal something important. Follow up on this privately so they know they're heard.)
- Practice names with the whole class repeatedly so everyone learns each other's names.
- When students enter, greet them by name. If you forget a name, playfully ask for a hint and offer a small reward (a sticker, the chance to line up first). When they line up to leave class, practice again. Get students to do the same. Let them help each other. When you see students outside class, call out their names.
- Jot down notes for anyone whose name you hesitate on or forget. Start with their name tomorrow and write any detail to help you remember.



Names matter! Get everyone to learn each other's names the way they want them said.

How do I get to a well-managed classroom without a lot of management?

Grade-level adaptations

K-2: Instead of having students fill out the index cards, you can fill out a seating chart with the same information.

It's working if

- Students correct you and others if their name is mispronounced.
- Everyone says each other's names how they are meant to be said.
- By the end of week one, you know everyone's name and pronouns.

Grade-level adaptations

tailor the strategy for your age group. Good teaching is universal, but child development is not. Likewise, the daily life of a K-5 teacher seeing the same group across the day and that of a secondary teacher seeing many groups can be quite different.

It's working if indicators are typically based on what you or students will do as a result of the strategy, clarifying whether this strategy worked. They'll also help you pat yourself on the back as you mark progress.

Almost every strategy has an **image** showing what you'd write on the board, a planning document, or what you and your kids would be doing in the classroom. Use the image to help you envision how things will go, and tweak it to make it your own!

Get It Quick Video: Seeing is believing. These brief (one- to two-minute) videos will walk you through the strategy in a friendly, straightforward manner. I will give you the essential info verbally, so if you prefer listening to learn over reading, go here.

Demo Video: See it in action. You'll see and hear what a real teacher does, along with actual students and their authentic responses. Watch these with colleagues to learn together.

Resource

Video 2-2

Get It Quick The Name Game: Memory Tricks That Stick

What to Say: When the strategy is conversation-heavy, perhaps showing how to avoid a power struggle with a student,

navigate a tricky conversation with an upset parent, build connections with students, or shut down disrespect from students,

you'll see a script of sorts, giving you the language to use so you feel confident knowing what to say and when.

1.1

Coach/Admin support

Together, list upcoming and pressing tasks on the teacher's to-do list. Map out how long those tasks will take from start to finish. Choose a short task for them to do while you are sitting together. Remind them when the time is up and encourage them to be done, no matter what.

Genuinely thank them (and any new teacher) for protecting time for teaching and students if they decline to run an extracurricular or attend an event outside school hours.

How do I manage the workload if I never feel done?

Set firm end times, try the Pomodoro Technique, and find a parallel play work partner to protect your time.

The workload will never get done. You'll sleep better if you embrace this a bit. Use strategies to make the to-do list *manageable*.

- Set time frames for your to-do list and stick to the end times.
 1. Do a brain dump of your to-do list, including work and personal life.
 2. You might be brave enough to cross off a nonessential task or move it down to the bottom. For now, choose one thing you have to get done.
 3. Map out how long that task should take from start to finish. Set a timer for that amount of time, and dive in. Commit to using *only* the allotted time and being "done" with that task when the timer goes off, even if the quality isn't to your standards.
 4. Stick to the timer repeatedly, and you'll get better at estimating the time you need. You'll also be less tempted to go on social media and get distracted. Finally, if you struggle with perfectionism, this will help you finish it so it's "good enough." Submit that "good-enough" work enough times and you'll realize everything still works out.
- The Pomodoro® Technique (Cirillo) is based on our typical productivity capacity, which is about twenty-five minutes. After that, we need a short break to reset. Here's how:
 1. Choose a task and set a timer for twenty-five minutes. If you use your phone, tuck it under something so it's not a mental distraction. Work on that one task until the timer goes off, and then take a five-minute break.
 2. Reset the timer for twenty-five minutes on and five minutes off up to three times. Then, take a more substantial break.
 3. Enjoy just how much you accomplished in those chunks of time!

- Find a parallel play work partner. This strategy often benefits people with ADHD, but it works for anyone! We benefit from the presence of another person in the room, even if we don't interact with them. Sharing a space with someone who is focused on work can help us concentrate, too. Sit side by side in an empty classroom, or meet virtually. This isn't collaborative time, so it can be anyone, not just a fellow teacher.
- Say, "Thanks for thinking of me. Let me get back to you," when asked to do an extra thing at school or invited to a social obligation, such as heading the newspaper or attending your second cousin's baby shower. Then, give it a hard look to see if it will energize or deplete you and whether you'd be better off lesson planning or napping. As a new teacher, aim to circle back and politely decline nine times out of ten. Remember that saying no is saying yes to your mental health.
- Read emails anytime, but *reply* to emails only once a day at a consistent time. Add a note to your email signature so people know you'll respond. Letting emails sit for a bit limits back-and-forth. Often, people answer their own questions in a short wait time! Also, you will respond with a calmer, fresh mind.



This teacher gives tasks a clear time limit. When time's up, they move on—done is better than perfect.

It's working if

- You submitted work that wasn't quite up to your standards and lived to tell the tale.
- You said no to an extra at work or a social obligation.
- Emails are taking up less time.

Resource

Video 1-1

Get It Quick Taming Your Teaching Workload

1.12

Coach/Admin support

Spend as much time as possible helping this teacher learn the basics, and don't assume any prior knowledge. Introduce them to the central office staff, custodians, and guidance staff, even if they've already met. Before jumping into your agenda, start with their questions. Check in often.

Want to know more?

"The Ultimate Guide to Starting a Teaching Job Mid-Year" by Jennifer Gonzalez (Cult of Pedagogy website)

It's working if

- You are consistently kind to yourself and your students, knowing this is a hard transition for everyone.
- You have a running list of questions, and you get over being shy or apologetic when asking for answers.

Resource

Video 1-7 *Get It Quick*
Midyear Start: Your Quick Launch Guide

How do I start strong if I'm hired midyear?

Have realistic expectations, focus on relationships, and ask for help.

Give yourself a lot of grace! You are managing two hard things: being new and coming in midyear. It can still be a great first year of teaching. (Plus, you're already halfway to summer break!)

- Keep expectations realistic for you and your students, especially if you replace several teachers or the previous teacher left unexpectedly. Are students reasonably following directions and in a routine? Are you getting to the basics of the curriculum? Are you showing up? If so, congratulations on a job well done.
- Start a running list of questions and set aside time daily to get answers. People are busy and doing their thing. Be brave in asking for help regularly. You'll need it.
- Expect lots of surprise moments that no one warned you about. Administrators may forget to tell you it's assembly day or that grades are submitted in X fashion. Do your best to roll with it.
- Review the discipline policy carefully; then, ask two teachers or administrators how it is interpreted. Rarely is it something followed to a T.
- Do a preassessment to find out what students know instead of starting where they supposedly left off in the curriculum.
- Keep your classroom setup minimal. This is not the year for a showcase design. Ensure the basic organization systems are set up: a place to write the day's agenda, another to hand in work, and a seating chart to help you learn names. Anything else is a bonus.
- Establish a clear set of classroom guidelines, using the system of another teacher on that grade team if possible. If you adopt a system from a teacher your students know, tell them, "We're using Ms. X's system."
- Devote plenty of time to routines (see Chapter 3) and relationship building (Chapter 4). For example, see how to learn names right away! These students deserve a consistent, reliable teacher who makes them feel cared for and seen. Above all else, be that person.

1.13

How do I avoid decision fatigue?

Embrace predictability in meals, outfits, lessons, and more.

Maybe you go home to a magical person who says, “Just relax; I’ve got it from here.” If so, clone them for the rest of us. Most of us are exhausted from decision fatigue.

With the countless decisions you need to make in a day, you’ll only have the energy to make smart choices on some. Protect your energy for inevitable, unexpected, and important decisions like what to do when the wireless connection stops working, how to help a student who’s been absent, whether you have time to run to the bathroom during your prep, or if you should laugh at a fart joke. Do this by removing other decisions and minimizing the low-stakes ones when possible.

- Maybe you can create a work uniform. Find a replicable look that is comfortable, can go in the washer and dryer, and has pockets. Maybe it’s flowy pants with a tucked-in T, a cotton blazer with stretchy denim, or a collared shirt and cargo pants. Get a few versions of that one look to rotate throughout the week.
- ✚ Ask what is considered professional and appropriate in your school. Comfort is key, but no one wants to be called into the office about their outfit.
- ✚ Hang up all your outfits for the week in advance. Morning stress can lead to outfit indecision and you’ll avoid coming home to a pile of rejected outfits.
- If food shopping and meal-prep decisions are tiring you out, choose an easy dinner for each night and repeat weekly. Tuesday is taco night, Wednesday is pasta, and so on, every weeknight. If it works for your household, include one for takeout, leftovers, sandwiches, or a YOYO (you’re on your own) dinner. Create a corresponding grocery list on repeat, including lunch prep. Pack what you’ll eat, not what you think you should eat (a sandwich versus my untouched salad). A hungry teacher is an unhappy teacher.
- Your default answer to any requests on your time might be “Thanks. Let me think about it and get back to you.”

Coach/Admin support

Go over the last time when the teacher felt overwhelmed by decisions. Was it during teaching? On a Sunday? Getting ready for work? Walk through that time and consider what decisions they can streamline or make uniform, one by one.

Want to know more?

“Stress Less, Focus More: Tips for Reducing Teacher Decision Fatigue” by Continental (Continental website)

2.2

Coach/Admin support

Make sure your new teachers know routines, too! Before you do any new teacher induction training or support, list what they need to know for various parts of the day and year. For example, before students arrive, they'll need to know emergency procedures, important dates for staff, how to take attendance, how to access supplies, where to get tech support, protocols for IEPs and 504s, and how to make sub plans. Make lists for what they should know before parent-teacher conferences, before the first semester ends, before testing, and so on.

I've heard it's important to get routines and procedures in place. What does that mean?

Get students to do the right thing by showing them what to do and how to do it and having them practice. Do this even for routines they should already know.

A teacher I knew repeatedly told her class to “behave,” and one of her students once retorted, “I’m being *have*!” He had no idea what it meant.

When we tell students things like “Behave” and “Be a friend to others,” those instructions can feel wildly unclear. Even if we give seemingly concrete instructions like “Listen,” “Put your homework in the bin,” or “Take turns,” students may still wonder what that means. This is why you need to be crystal clear about what behaving in your class means and have them practice *lots*. Teaching routines is one of the essential ways you’ll set up students for a successful year.

What routines should I teach?

If the school year hasn’t started, imagine being a student new to your class and school. Walk through the entire day or class. What would you want to know so you felt comfortable? Anticipate even the steps you might assume students know. What should you do when you get to the classroom door? When you’re seated? Have a question? Need to use the bathroom? Channeling your students’ perspectives helps you catch all they need to know.

It can also help you think through each block of your class. For example, your math class might typically consist of a warm-up, direct instruction, centers or independent work, and a final share time or closing. What should students do for each part? What do they need? Consider possible what-ifs that might trip students up, from what to do if they’re late to what to do when morning announcements are played.

Choose a few routines to teach in the first day or two, starting with entering class, unpacking or getting settled, using the bathroom, and accessing materials. Keep a checklist of all the possible routines to ensure you get to them across the first weeks of school.

If you're already into the school year, know it's never too late to return to routines! Add to your list of routines mentioned here with all the reminders you frequently give students (wait for others to finish speaking, clean up materials) or what they do inconsistently (find their seats, put phones away). It's OK to go back to routines you already taught at the start of the year.

How do I teach these routines?

1. Spy on yourself doing a routine by physically walking through it. For example, sit at a desk and then walk over to the homework bin with a paper in your hand. How did you know it was the right time to go? What did you check on your paper before handing it in?
2. Jot down what you did as steps on a chart. Younger students and students with processing needs will benefit from fewer steps at a time. If you list more than five steps to do anything, see if you can break it down into two different routines. The chart should outline what to do versus what *not* to do. Post it where students can easily see it.
3. Teach the routine right when students will need to use it. Teach how to access science materials right before science starts, how to form groups before the first group work, and so on. Show students what to do by walking through it just as they will, narrating aloud each step as you do and referring to the chart.
4. Have students practice this routine at least once, if not more. Practice several different ways, each time with a smile. This should feel inviting and even playful, not like punishment.

It's unlikely that students will thank you for the chance to practice coming into class four times. Prepare yourself for a bit of resistance and set the expectation anyway. Once students know the routine, resist the urge to repeat or explain it.

**If you're already
into the school
year, know it's
never too late
to return to
routines!**

Grade-level adaptations

K–2: Charts that detail each routine's steps should be short, heavy on images and symbols, and light on text. Keep the routine to three or four steps for K and not many more for grades 1 and 2.

6–12: Do not assume that your older students know how to enter your class, answer a question, find a partner, get your attention, or hand in work. You will set them up for success by explaining precisely what you want them to do for each of these actions and more.

2.8

Coach/Admin support

Ask the teacher for something they repeatedly said to the class recently that students didn't do immediately. Rework it as a request in a few words, and determine an action together that reinforces the request.

How do I get students to do the right thing without repeating myself or raising my voice?

Calmly request (don't ask or complain), say little, walk away, and stay regulated. Use silent reinforcement with "Take a minute" cards.

The louder I get, and the more I talk, the more my students (and children) tune me out. Here's how to keep them tuned in.

At a glance

Stick with these simple guidelines that raise your chances of getting students to listen and respond the first time, willingly:

- * Stay calm and steady. Keep your tone kind but firm and your volume soft, and don't show any big emotions (even if you feel them).
- * Say little.
- * Make a request (don't ask), and walk away.
- * State what you want to see far more than criticize what you don't like.

Digging deeper

Our best intentions and hard work won't get us anywhere if we're worked up, ask students to do things that are not optional, or talk too much. Students need us to be steady and reassuring and to say less so they can reset. Get to better behaviors with these steps:

1. Calm your voice (and maybe your emotions) before directing students. Count, breathe, or busy yourself for a moment, but do not react or yell. If you need a few seconds to regulate, put your tongue on the roof of your

mouth for a moment, or count backward from one hundred in multiples of eight. If your voice carries emotion, anxiety, or impatience, it will cause you to work harder to get them to cooperate. You may worry that if you say something calmly, no one will respond. If students are used to hearing things multiple times, usually escalating in volume, see Strategy 2.12. Also, let them know this new approach in advance: "From now on, I will give directions in a soft voice, so have your ears on alert. Here's what my voice will sound like . . ."

2. Phrase all requests as directions, not options. Questions make it sound like students get to decide: "Can you put the books back?" "Will you be quiet?" "Will everyone line up?" We should say what we mean: "Please put the books on the shelf." "It's time to listen." "Everyone, line up at the door." Don't leave wiggle room for opting out.
3. Make requests, not criticisms. For example, replace "Don't use that language in our classroom—it's offensive" with "Use language that makes everyone around you comfortable. Say, 'Darn,' 'Bummer,' or '[insert any antiquated or goofy phrase]' if you're frustrated." Criticisms can shame students, and shame is a powerful and often alienating emotion for them to sit with. Requests also focus on what *will* happen, not what already happened.

Say less. If students hear lengthy directions repeated several times, they learn to tune us out. When we pair minimal words with a move that reinforces their meaning, students have reason to look *and* listen the first time.

Grade-level adaptations

K–2 and any class with students who benefit from added supports: Visual supports benefit very young students and any student or group who can use a scaffold (which is all of us, sometimes). If students still struggle to listen the first time, create a chart heavy on images and light on text that you can point to when reminders are needed.

4.10

Coach/Admin support

List your new teachers' names. Can you say three things about each that don't relate to their job performance? If not, seek these people out and listen to them. Then, lead this exercise for grade-team colleagues. Print a picture of each student and have everyone initial it if they know three nonacademic details about them. Circulate and reflect on gaps: What does it say about the school and who feels seen based on these dots or lack thereof? What goals will you collectively set to shore up those gaps?

How do I make sure no one falls through the cracks?

If you know three details about a student unrelated to academics, put a dot next to their name.

Get to know the students without dots.

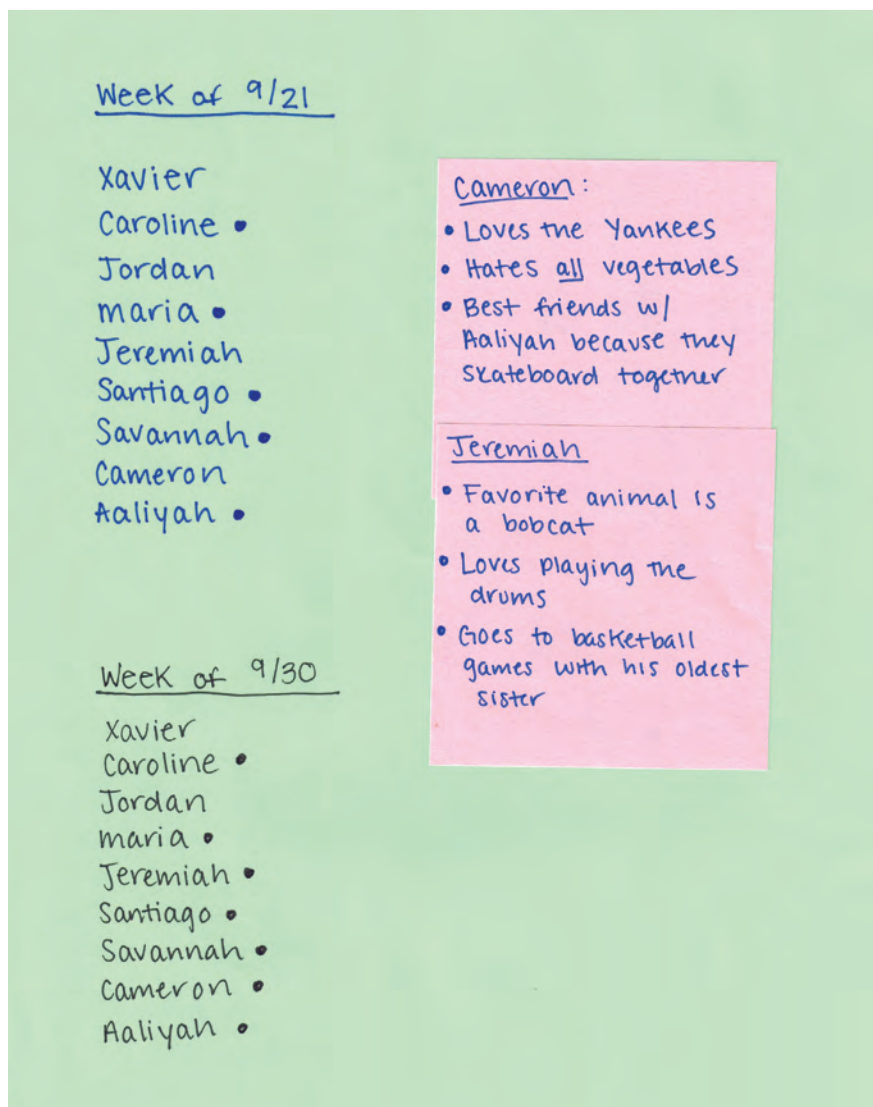
Here's a prediction: if you do this strategy, you can expect students to be more successful academically. But because you care about kids, you'll try this for another reason: it will make students feel good about themselves and your class.

Here's how to make sure every student is fully seen:

1. Make a copy of your roster or write each student's name.
2. For each name, try to mentally list three specific details about that student that have nothing to do with academics. Absences, behaviors, and academic skills don't count. Each detail needs to be specific to them, such as what they like to do outside of school or who their close friends are.
3. If you can state three specific details, put a dot or your initial next to their name.
4. Anyone who doesn't have a mark goes on a new, private page that you will keep handy for the next week or two. Take a minute to look over the students without dots. Are they the same gender? Race? All shy or extroverted? The gaps between whom we know and whom we don't know can reveal unconscious biases. If there are any similarities among these students, you now have a clear path of where to devote more attention.
5. Talk to those students and pay closer attention to them. Whom do they gravitate toward in the hallways? In class? What are they talking about during downtime? Greet them and ask them open-ended questions. Listen carefully.
6. Return to a blank roster in a couple of weeks and track who gets a mark and who is still unknown. Keep going and repeat as needed. If you do this with grade-team colleagues, share what you learned so everyone knows these students better. This is also highly effective to do with a group of

teachers who share the same students. Try it at a grade-team meeting or with at least one colleague.

- Also, go to Strategy 2.10 to ensure you have sufficient notes for every student. Any student with an emptier (or blank) page deserves your attention and outreach.



Look for any students' names that don't have dots. By the following week, see if you can add dots to any of those names, based on the new information you've gained by talking to them more.

Grade-level adaptations

6–12: You likely see many students throughout the week, so it's realistic that you might have many gaps, especially early in the year. Do it early, however, and often throughout the year to track progress. Older students still long to feel seen. Coupling this with Strategy 2.10 will help.

It's working if

- You can easily name three things about every student that have nothing to do with school.

Resource

Video 4-6

Get It Quick The Three Things Check: See Every Student Clearly

6.5

What do I do when students run out of steam quickly or say, “I’m done”?

Prioritize volume, set goals for longer stretches, and offer choices to keep going.

In my first year, students used to come to me with just a sentence or two of writing and say, “I’m done!” I would reply, “A writer’s never done.” I can safely say that it never once resulted in a student happily writing more. Here are some things to try so you have better answers and busier students:

- Congratulate them for being “done” with *something*, if appropriate. “You finished that paragraph!” “Those three problems are done!”
- Offer choices for what to do next, all preapproved by you. “Do you want to work more on this piece, return to an older one, or start a new one?”
- Set a volume goal and tell them you’ll come back to check. Put a timer on your phone as a reminder or have them use a timer. Visual countdown timers are especially helpful. “You think you can finish five problems in the next ten minutes? OK, I’ll check on those five answers in ten minutes, at 1:33.”
- Give them a volume goal in advance when you send them off to work. “You will work on your stories for the next ten minutes. Drag your hand down your paper and put an X where you think you can get to in that time.”
- Plan moments to pause and reset. You can give students a quick stretch break and a tip on how to keep going. As you circulate among quick workers at the start, you’ll often see examples you can share at that break time that will inspire others.
- Have them plan individual times to pause and then keep going. For example, they can put a sticky note on the page or math problem where they’ll stop, take a breath, and look around. Then, they can

Coach/Admin support

How do you stay focused, even when a task is unappealing or hard to do? Discuss what motivates you or makes it easier to keep going. Plan volume goals for upcoming lessons that the teacher can share before sending students off to work. Then, plan two to three backup moves when the inevitable hands go up or students veer off task.

Grade-level adaptations

K–2: Time on task might be as little as two to three minutes at a time before you slowly build up to longer stretches. Adjust for shorter chunks of time of independent work right before lunch and at the end of the day.

6–12: Doing nothing is sometimes preferable to making mistakes at these ages. Keep reminding them (and yourself) that doing something is always better than doing nothing. Resist the urge to give advice, such as “A writer is never done!” or “You’ll never know if you don’t try!” Those adages will fall flat. It is better to offer choices as much as possible and note it anytime they do more than before.

It's working if

- Students spend longer on tasks and produce more work than before.
- You are living with some compromises that allow students to build focus and stamina, even if they're not all doing the same work.

move the sticky note as far as they think they can go before needing another break.

- Offer a more accessible text or task if this one is challenging for them. Stamina suffers when we do tough things! “Do the first ten problems, and let’s cross out the last five.” Or fold their paper in half and have them fill that space instead of all of it.
- Side projects will help students build stamina and prevent them from distracting others, even if they’re not on task with the actual lesson. Can they do comic panels? Write a letter? Read their choice book? Play a math game? Live with that compromise, knowing they’re building an independent focus. Eventually, you can incorporate more time on the target topic and less on the side project.



Time and volume goals help students hold themselves accountable and use their time well.

Resource

Video 6-4

Demo From “I Can’t” to “I Can”: Building Student Drive