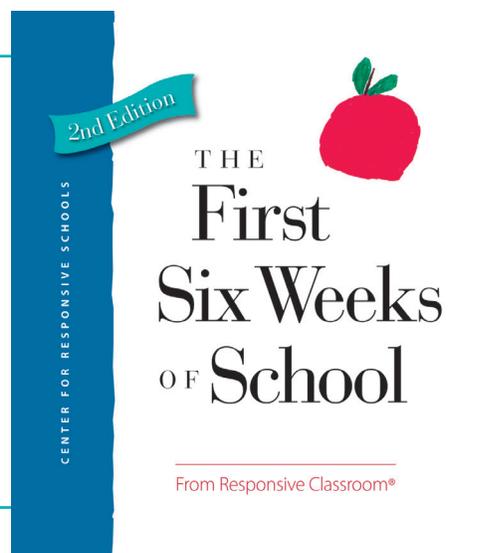


The First Six Weeks of School

From Responsive Classroom



Introduction: The Promise of a New Year

The introduction offers four overarching goals to be accomplished during the first six weeks of school. Which goal speaks to you the most and why?

The authors note, “There’s nothing exact or magical about the number six. Sometimes a class accomplishes the goals in less time; sometimes it takes a bit longer.” What do you expect to see in your classroom when you have accomplished these four goals?

Be sure to read the section titled “Getting the Most From This Book” to understand how the book is organized and how to quickly navigate the many strategies and appendices included. You can read it cover-to-cover or dive into a certain chapter or section as you need it. Many teachers read this book two times a year: once before the school year starts for planning and then again as a day-by-day guide through the first weeks of the school year!

First Day of School

Creating a welcoming and caring tone is a primary objective on this important first day, more so than having walls covered with posters and shelves stocked with supplies. Think about the first days of school you've experienced. What was the same as and different from what's described in this book?

Communicating with parents and caregivers before the first day of school helps strengthen home-to-school connections. How do you plan to set a positive tone with parents and caregivers as the school year begins?

As you read the section for your grade level, what surprised you about the proposed schedule and activities?

Week One

There are six goals for Week One, all with the intention of building a collaborative classroom where children master rigorous academic content while developing social-emotional competencies. Rather than diving right into challenging schoolwork, it's crucial in this first week to take the time to build a strong sense of trust and safety. As the authors explain, "We can begin academic work through community building and build community through that academic work."

Review the six goals for Week One carefully. Which goals are most important to you? Which goals do you feel confident about working towards, and which may be more challenging?

Week Two

Slow and steady progress is what's needed in Week Two. Students may be feeling more comfortable with the school day now that they are two weeks in. What growth and successes are you starting to see in your classroom community as students settle in?

The goals for this week focus on building a positive learning community, collaborating and connecting with classmates, and gaining confidence with routines and procedures. Compare the six goals for the week with the sample schedules provided for your grade level. Where do you see opportunities for students to work towards each of the goals embedded within the schedule? How can you adapt these schedules to meet the needs of your school setting?

Week Three

After building a strong sense of safety in the first two weeks of school, Week Three is the “transition to independence.” Students may be ready to start some positive risk-taking activities, with the support of their teachers. Remember that not all students will reach this point at the same time, so close observation is key. What are some of the signs you might see from your students to let you know they are ready for a challenge?

This week, you may be noticing students successfully using new routines and procedures, working collaboratively, and demonstrating increased stamina. You also might encounter some bumps in the road. How can you reinforce these successes and redirect small misbehaviors to support your students? How can you use reflection as a tool for your students to consider their growth so far in the school year?

Weeks Four to Six

By the fourth week of school, teachers likely have a sense of what is working well for students and what is not yet. The goals for Weeks Four to Six are for each student to be an active member of the learning community, fully engaged academically, and more self-sufficient. Use these three goals as a way to reflect on how you can support individual students where they are. As you observe your students throughout the day, consider when and where you see them experiencing successes and struggles. How can you reinforce what’s going well and support continued growth?

This chapter of the book does not contain sample schedules. How can you build on the examples from previous chapters to provide the balance that students need of academics with social and emotional learning, stillness with movement, group collaboration with individual work? How can you use what you have learned about your students and their strengths and challenges to build a schedule that gives them the support they need?

Conclusion

As the first six weeks of the school year come to a close, the authors suggest that “this point in the school year is the perfect time for reflection.” What practices and strategies in this book did you find particularly interesting and motivating? What approaches worked well in your classroom? What will you do differently next year?

Your hard work in the first six weeks is an important investment for a successful year of learning!

