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PAGE Supports Educators in Mission to Best Support Students

By Craig Harper, PAGE Executive Director

As you step into your first professional role in education, be aware of the important place you will occupy in the lives of countless students in the years to come. Getting to know your students — their interests, hopes and dreams — will form the beneficial relationships that will allow you to give your best effort to their success.

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Novice Teachers Share What Your First Year Will Really Be Like ... And How to Thrive

By Meg Thornton and Scotty Brewington
race yourself. Your first year of teaching will be all-consuming. Everything will be new and will thus require supreme effort. The PAGE New Teacher Guide is designed to help make the transition from student to teacher as seamless as possible. In the profiles below, Georgia teachers with just a few years under their belts share how they successfully navigated their first year, and they describe what they learned about teaching — and themselves — along the way.

**Kelly Gordon**

**Physical Education Teacher, Dewar ES, Lowndes County**

For Kelly Gordon, the hardest part of being a new teacher was learning that you will make mistakes — daily. She now follows the advice of legendary North Carolina basketball coach Dean Smith: “What to do with a mistake: Recognize it. Admit it. Learn from it. Forget it.”

A particularly challenging realization for Gordon was that everything will not go as planned, “so you have to celebrate the small victories,” she said. “You can spend hours planning a great lesson that is destroyed in less than five minutes. It is easy to get frustrated when things like this happen, but you have to learn to take it in stride and be thankful for everything that does go right, no matter how small it may be.”

Alternatively, a happy surprise for Gordon was the unconditional love that students show day in and day out. “Even on your worst days, your students will love you and they will remind you — even if it is subtly — why you love what you do,” she said.

Students crave your love and support, noted Gordon. “They respect you and look up to you, even on the days that they don’t show it,” she said. “An encouraging word each and every day, no matter how frustrated they make you, can and will go a long way.”

Regarding parents, Gordon said that it’s very important to keep them in the loop and help them become a part of their child’s education. “Communication is key. Show parents how invested you are in the education of their children, and they will invest in you,” she added.
Devon Murray
Band Instructor, Factory Shoals Middle School, Douglas County

As a new band director, Devon Murray felt as if he had to have an answer for all of his students’ questions. The last thing he ever wanted to say is “I don’t know.” When one of his students wanted to learn to play the bassoon — an instrument Murray knew nothing about — he spent hours watching videos, reading and practicing during his planning time. “I didn’t want to be the reason why my student failed at possibly being the best musician of all time,” he recalled.

Now, with a couple years of teaching behind him, Murray has learned to have faith in his students and what he has taught them. “When I began teaching, I didn’t eat or sleep enough when my band classes were close to performing. Other teachers may relate to this with regard to student performance on high-stakes testing,” he said. “However, I came to realize that I have prepared my students with the tools, techniques and confidence to perform well. They have now performed multiple times, and they have never let me down, nor do they intend to do so. Now, instead of worrying about performances, I welcome them.”

As a new teacher, Murray’s most pleasant surprise was the tremendous support he receives from the faculty and staff. “Some of my colleagues have even stayed after school to listen to my band practice. They attend every performance, participate in fundraisers, and are always there to lend a hand when needed. I am so blessed to be a part of such a supportive family,” he added.

The best advice Murray has ever received about teaching is to not worry if students don’t retain everything. “I would sometimes get upset if I spent days or even weeks on a lesson, just to have students forget most of it a month later,” he said. “Then one of my childhood teachers suggested that I think back to when I was in middle school — back to when I was taking eight classes, doing multiple homework assignments and participating in sports, while still finding time to play with friends. It’s impossible for students to retain everything.”

Sarah Tumlin
Fourth Grade Teacher, Baggett Elementary School, Gwinnett County

Sarah Tumlin always knew that teaching was her destiny. “Even on the really hard days, it’s never made me question where I am supposed to be. This is what I want to do with my life,” said the second-year teacher in Gwinnett County. Still, despite her inner calling and all of the years of training — in high school she studied early-
childhood education and was in Future Georgia Educators — she wasn’t prepared for the fatigue teaching brings.

“I knew that teaching was exhausting, but ‘teacher tired’ is a real thing that you can’t understand until you’re in it,” she said. “I realize now that I have to take care of myself, because if I don’t, I can’t take care of them. I have to give myself time and not (work) to the point that work is all I do.”

Tumlin also noted that effective teachers become part of the school community. “You have to build relationships with the kids, but also with the people you work with and the community,” she said. Working in a Title I school, Tumlin experienced some culture shock at first. Where she grew up, most students looked like her and shared similar life experiences. But Gwinnett County proved to be more of a cultural melting pot.

“I have had to learn how to be aware of different cultures and backgrounds, and how people respond to different situations,” she said. “I thought it would be an easy transition, but it takes work.”

Bridging this cultural gap also relies on constantly communicating with parents. The key is making yourself available — especially as a new teacher, Tumlin said. “They know they can contact me through e-mail or my personal number. Many of our parents can’t call between 7 a.m. and 3 p.m. because they are working,” she said. Ongoing dialogue changes the atmosphere in the classroom. “When students know I have a relationship with Mom and Dad, it changes the dynamic for the better,” she added.

Tumlin’s best advice for new teachers is to find mentors: “It can be hard because you don’t want to tell people you are struggling, but there are so many people who care about you and want to see you succeed. The kids in your classroom aren’t just yours — we look at them as all of our kids and we want them to succeed.”

Jakayla Woolridge
First Grade Teacher, Emma Hutchinson Elementary School, Atlanta Public Schools
As valedictorian of her 2017 class at Clark Atlanta University, Jakayla Woolridge could have chosen any profession, but her heart — and destiny — has always been in teaching.

“It’s something I have been passionate about since I was a little girl. I’ve had wonderful teachers who inspired me. I wanted to give back and become an educator. I wanted to go where my heart wanted me to go,” she said.

Woolridge grew up in the same district where she is now a third-year, first-grade teacher at Emma Hutchinson Elementary School, a Title 1 school in

‘I knew that teaching was exhausting, but “teacher tired” is a real thing that you can’t understand until you’re in it.’
— Sarah Tumlin
Atlanta. Woolridge also did her student teaching here, which was helpful because she was able to get to know the students, staff and parents in advance.

“Building relationships with my students helps them to achieve more in the classroom,” said Woolridge. “Yes, you want to teach content, but you also have to focus on the whole child and the socio-economic aspect as well.”

For Woolridge, the most challenging part of being a new teacher was analyzing student data and trying to create instruction based on that data. And she realized quickly that learning about teaching while in college is very different than actually (teaching) 25 wide-eyed and bubbly students.

“When you’re in college, you talk about different theorists, you go over some of your professors’ previous experiences as classroom teachers and then you are a student teacher working under a mentor teacher. It is one thing to talk about it,” she said, “but it’s totally different when you walk into a classroom by yourself.”

Woolridge advises new teachers to stay flexible and always make time for yourself. “You have to go according to the curriculum and you want to go by the book, but sometimes you have to pull from your arsenal of strategies to reach all students,” she said. “Also — and I wish I would have taken this advice myself — it is OK to live your life. Don’t put yourself in the space where you have to do everything. Don’t overwhelm yourself. When you have a break, breathe.”

Especially gratifying to Woolridge are the meaningful relationships she has built with her students. “Students will tell you so much about themselves, which is a beautiful thing,” she said. “They definitely go through some things that will leave your heart very heavy. They tell you everything. Some of the things they go through, kids should not have to experience — especially at 6 years old.”

Tyler Calhoun
Kindergarten Teacher, Hull-Sanford Elementary School, Madison County
Tyler Calhoun has been teaching kindergarten for two years, but she started her career as a second-grade teacher three years ago in Greer, S.C. Both schools are Title 1.

As a new teacher, Calhoun was surprised by the wide range of learning abilities that can exist within a single classroom.

“I didn’t realize how different the ability levels would be in a grade level,” said Calhoun. “The range you have to differentiate for in every grade is unbelievable. It’s a lot deeper than you realize.”

Calhoun also realized early on that flexibility is key. Despite years of classroom observation, student teaching and learning to prepare lesson
plans, things always change.

“There’s a lot of winging it. Your plans never go as planned,” she said. “In college, they have you make very detailed lesson plans, but in reality, that’s just not possible. And if you put too many details in your plan, you’ll end up getting frustrated because nine times out of 10, it doesn’t go according to the plan.”

As far as dealing with parental problems, the kindergarten teacher said it is important to bring administration into the conversation early. “It’s easy when dealing with parents for it to turn into a he said/she said thing. It’s good to always have a third party involved so it is clear what was said, and you can get information and advice on how to approach parents. Don’t try to handle it on your own.”

What’s Calhoun’s biggest piece of advice for new teachers? “Try to stay organized, and if you have to work late, pick a few days, but (stop work) at a decent time on the other days because you know the work will be there tomorrow. There is nothing more important than your mental health. You have to give yourself that time.”

Will Acosta
Sixth Grade Social Studies Teacher, Howard Middle School, Bibb County

After his first education class in college, Will Acosta told his mother — a retired kindergarten teacher in Houston County — that teaching just wasn’t for him. Instead, he went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in communications and a master’s degree in sports management. But after a few years in the sports industry, Acosta said God called him back to the classroom.

“I have a love for students, and I love to coach as well, so teaching is the best place for me to serve and use my gifts,” he said. Acosta taught fifth grade his first year and now teaches sixth grade social studies in Bibb County, where he also coaches soccer and football.

The hardest part of his job has been drawing the line between being his students’ teacher and being their friend. “I had this dream that I could do all of these great things and be best friends with my students, but there’s a fine line between friendship and the student-teacher relationship. Students change moods second to second.”

He has learned that the best way to manage challenging students is to be kind but firm. “Tough love goes a long way. It helps build relationships and respect with students who are harder to reach.” He said. After spending one-on-one time with these students, Acosta realized “that they are some of the better relationships” he has formed. “I have really walked side by side with them, and they know I care and am...
doing whatever I can to help them succeed.

A big surprise about teaching, Acosta said, was the time commitment. "I didn't know how many hours went into teaching. I thought you (started) school at 7:30, taught your lessons, graded some papers" and then closed up shop, he said. "But teaching, plus coaching, meetings, paperwork, parent contact — it adds up quick."

As far as parental support goes, Acosta said transparency is key. "I am a firm believer in being transparent with parents. … Better communication leads to student success. If answering the phone on a Saturday night will help a student succeed, I'll do it."

Finally, Acosta advised that it's OK to not have all of the answers. "Like students, teachers are lifelong learners. I was hard on myself in the beginning if I didn't have all of the answers, but when you feel like you have everything figured out, that's when you're in trouble because you never do," he said. "It's OK to ask for help."

Leigha McCord
Eighth Grade Social Studies Teacher, Lilburn Middle School, Gwinnett County

Leigha McCord always knew she wanted to be a teacher, just like her mentor, who taught 8th grade social studies at Loganville Middle School. She also found inspiration from her family. Her mother and sister are teachers, and her grandmother and great grandmother worked in schools.

McCord credits her high school courses in early-childhood education and her participation in Future Georgia Educators for helping prepare her for the classroom. But the biggest challenge she faced as a new teacher was learning how to effectively manage her time.

"People always say that teaching is easy, but I knew it was difficult. I just didn't know how difficult until I was in a classroom by myself," said McCord. "You have to learn to manage your time and make time for yourself, or you won't be a good teacher."

She has found that the key to effective time management is preparation: making time for lesson planning over the summer and on weekends, and catching up on grading when you can so that you aren't stressed. "You think you know your content well, but you still need to study the teacher notes to make sure you are teaching the right stuff," said McCord. "You have to prepare your lessons and make sure they are academically challenging enough, while also making sure you are meeting the needs of all students."

McCord, who last year earned a master's in teaching from the University of North Georgia, said that being a young teacher helps her relate to her students. "I knew that technology was big in their lives, but I didn't realize how big it is, especially with middle school students," and especially regarding social media.

Building strong relationships is paramount, she added. "I work in a Title 1 school, and the kids won't learn from you if they don't like you. You have to really get to know them so you can better prepare lessons to teach them. Solid relationships with parents are important as well. "A lot of parents have multiple jobs and some are not English speaking, but they care about their kids and want to know how they are doing in class," she said.

What is McCord's best advice for new teachers? "While I was a student teacher, one of my
coworkers told me to never let a teenager ruin your day. It’s so true — especially teaching middle and high school. These kids are still learning. They don’t know how to control their emotions. So when they say something rude, they didn’t necessarily mean it. Don’t let it get to you.”

Kelly Jo Plante
Special Education Teacher, Midway Elementary School, Forsyth County
When Kelly Jo Plante first stepped into her own classroom three years ago, she admittedly struggled. “We all graduate with dreams of the perfect classroom with beautifully manicured procedures and expert-level lesson plans. In reality, it doesn’t work that way,” she warned. “I had a hard time accepting that something I was doing with my kids wasn’t working and that I needed a new approach. It was hard to swallow my pride and say, ‘It’s OK; I’m a first-year teacher. Everything does not need to be perfect’ — especially when I compared myself to veteran teachers,” she added. “New teachers strive to be those teachers ... and we will be one day.”

Plante, who last year switched from teaching fourth grade to special education, was also surprised by how the experience differed from when she was a student teacher. “Having your own students creates a much deeper relationship whereby trust and loyalty is built. I did not realize that would happen.”

Along the way, Plante has learned that it’s crucial to know how your kids function, how they learn best, and how they stay focused. “We know that all kids are different, but it’s important to know that groups of kids work differently as well,” she said. “I have tried doing lessons that mirror the lessons of other teachers, but I realized that my students function differently than theirs. It is SO important to figure out how your class works together in a group and adapt your practices for them. Don’t try to make them change for you,” she added.

As a new teacher, Plante’s biggest relief was exceptional parental support. “I was nervous that parents would not like their students to be with a first-year teacher … . However, I have had the exact opposite experience,” she said. But it’s important, she added, to not “pretend you have everything figured out.”

Plante’s advice for new teachers is to “Take. A. Breath. When the kids are acting like it’s a full moon, take a breath. When it’s October and grades are due for the first time, take a breath. When lesson planning, grading, taking data, managing behaviors and organizing your life all become too much, take a breath. During that breath, remember why you are in this job.”

’Having your own students creates a much deeper relationship whereby trust and loyalty is built. I did not realize that would happen.’
— Kelly Jo Plante
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It’s About Getting to Know Your Students

By Tom Krause

It is normal for a beginning teacher to ask, “How am I doing?” More experienced teachers, however, learn to be more concerned about “How are my students doing?” To grow as a teacher, the focus must come off oneself and on to the students, and the only true way to know how your students are doing is to get to know them.

The Teacher/Student Connection

A young teacher was having trouble controlling her classroom. Frustrated to tears, she told a successful co-worker how nothing she had tried worked and that students seemed to be daring her to punish them. The fledgling teacher dreaded walking into her room each day, and she was already thinking of leaving the profession.

The experienced educator took out a piece of paper and instructed her co-worker to write down everything she knew about each student. The teacher was at a loss for words. Besides the names of the students, she could barely describe anything else about them.

Her colleague then gave the teacher an assignment. She was to interview each student individually to learn as much about them as she could. During the interviews, the new teacher began to make connections with each student. Almost immediately, the atmosphere in the room changed. The teacher learned that her real source of power does not come from the student discipline code; it comes from her positive connection with the students.

You’ll discover that the more you know about each student, the wiser you become as a teacher.

You’ll discover that the more you know about each student, the wiser you become as a teacher.

Many studies have found that a strong teacher/student connection brings positive results. Test scores increase, discipline referrals decline and the overall atmosphere in the classroom improves. If you have the opportunity, drive by the homes of your students to see the environment from which they come. That could explain why your students may feel your room is the best place they see all day.

President Theodore Roosevelt once said, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” The same applies to students. The personal connection a teacher has with the student is the most influential factor in student success.

Tom Krause is a retired Missouri Public School System educator and an international motivational speaker.
Like a Duck on Water

The Art of Navigating Smoothly Through Your First Year

By Mary Ruth Ray, PAGE
College Services Representative

An adage says that the perfect hostess is like a duck on water: calm on the surface but paddling like heck underneath! I have found that good teaching is the same. Have you ever noticed how excellent teachers make it look so easy? Their feathers aren’t ruffled, and their classrooms seem to run themselves without a ripple. How do they do it? They would probably be the first to tell you that despite all appearances of calmness, they are indeed paddling like there’s no tomorrow, but there are also some tricks of the trade that can help even novice teachers conduct smoother-running classrooms. Here are a few strategies that I found particularly helpful.

● Look ready. During pre-planning, you will be overwhelmed with things to do from lesson planning, meetings and permanent records, to securing textbooks and other materials. Prioritizing is a must.

   It was most important to me to get my physical environment ready, especially before an open house. When students and parents first meet you, they should observe that you are organized and ready to teach. An unfinished, messy classroom communicates the opposite. They won’t know if your permanent records haven’t all been filled out, but they will notice the unfinished bulletin board or the fact that you had to scramble to find a copy of your school supply list. As a first-year teacher, you may not “feel” ready for your first day of school, but you can look ready!

   ● Keep your classroom organized and tidy, and teach your students to do the same. A neat, uncluttered environment promotes calmness and security for you and your students. A chaotic environment can have the opposite effect and unintentionally communicate a haphazard approach to learning. Teach students to straighten their desks or chairs and pick up paper off the floor before leaving. Live by the old saying, “a place for everything and everything in its place.” My desk would accumulate papers throughout the day and become quite a mess, but each afternoon I cleaned, graded and filed until it was all gone. Before I left, a printed copy of my lesson plans for the next day and all necessary materials were laid out neatly enough that if a substitute had to be called in

Standing in the doorway during class changes lets you monitor behavior in the hall and your room at the same time, and you are positioned to curtail a situation before it blossoms into a problem. Furthermore, greeting each student with a warm welcome sets a positive tone for class.
unexpectedly, he or she could walk in and teach my lessons without missing a beat.

- Assign a seating chart — at least until you know your students’ names. I always kept the seating chart for each class in front of me so that I could call on students by name from day one. This makes the student-teacher interaction more personal and promotes the idea that you know what’s going on and are “in charge.” If you are resistant to the idea of assigning seats to older students, allow them to select their own desks on the first day, make a note of the seating arrangement and ask that they stay in those same desks for two weeks until you learn everyone’s name.

- Create routines that are not dependent on you. The more you can make the classroom run itself without your direct involvement, the more you are free to teach students. For instance, I took attendance each morning with a shoebox and clothespins. Each student had a clothespin with his or her name on it clipped to the side of the shoebox. As a student arrived in the morning, he or she unclipped that clothespin and dropped it in the box. After class was underway and I had a free moment, I could look at the clothespins left “standing” and easily see who was absent. Other ideas include training students to turn in homework to a specific location as they enter the room and assigning students to water plants or feed the class hamster. One exception to this rule is class dismissal. I recommend establishing that you, not the bell, dismiss the class. Otherwise, you have chaos break out when the bell interrupts you mid-sentence while you are giving important, last-minute homework instructions.

- Greet your students at the door. Much misbehavior begins in the hallway and is brought into the classroom. Standing in the doorway during class changes enables you to monitor behavior in both the hall and your room at the same time, and you are positioned to curtail a situation before it blossoms into a behavior problem. Furthermore, greeting each student with a warm welcome sets a positive tone for class.

- Have a warm-up assignment ready as students enter. Younger students may have a coloring sheet, while older students may have a math word problem or writing prompt. Train your students to begin working on the warm-up activity without having to be told. This takes advantage of every instructional minute and prevents behavior problems that arise from “down time.” It is also a helpful way to review previously taught skills. To be effective, the warm-up activities need to be meaningful, and students must know they will be held accountable for getting the work done.
I recommend establishing that you, not the bell, dismiss the class. Otherwise, chaos breaks out when the bell interrupts you while you are giving important, last-minute homework instructions.

Students have individual needs, learning styles and circumstances. You certainly want to have consistent rules and policies and be careful about making exceptions, but allow yourself room for professional judgment. I had a student who was severely hyperactive. Without the help of his medication, he literally could not keep still. He would put one knee in his seat, the other foot on the floor and bounce like a basketball. Furthermore, he was constantly traveling back and forth to the pencil sharpener. No amount of pleading, cajoling or threatening could stop him, or if it did stop him, he was unable to concentrate on his work from concentrating on staying still. So, acting on advice from a veteran educator, I moved his desk to the back of the room right next to the pencil sharpener and gave him carte blanche to bounce and sharpen to his heart’s content. Because he was in the back, his movements were not distracting to his classmates, and his mind was free to concentrate on his work. The system worked beautifully. Of course, it wouldn’t have made sense to allow this freedom to everyone in the class, but for this student it was the fairest thing I could have done.

I used a shoebox and clothespins to take attendance. Each student had a clothespin with his or her name on it clipped to the side of the shoe box. As a student arrived, he or she unclipped that clothespin and dropped it in the box.
New teachers: Beware the ides of late fall, specifically October through the December break. This period can be especially daunting for first-year educators.

New teachers start the year filled with excitement and a tremendous commitment to making a difference. Soon, however, they are consumed with unexpected challenges and the nonstop demands of teaching. According to the New Teacher Center, new teachers tend to hit the “disillusionment” phase in late fall. That’s when, coupled with being overwhelmed and tired, you realize that things aren’t going as smoothly as planned. In fact, you’re probably wondering what you’ve gotten yourself into.

Just knowing that this is completely normal can be a big help. In fact, many teachers experience this disillusionment phase each fall for several years. When you hit these rough waters, be sure to seek encouragement from a veteran teacher with a positive outlook. Visit other classrooms and watch experienced teachers. Take constructive criticism as positive feedback and grow from it. Find your groove.

Most of all, take care of yourself physically and emotionally and ride the wave until spring when disillusionment tends to give way to rejuvenation and ultimately anticipation for a great second year!
Georgia teachers are resilient and determined to teach in their highest capacity — no matter the difficulties. In March of this year, when schools suddenly shuttered in an emergency response to COVID-19, forcing educators to teach from home, Georgia teachers sprang into high gear to call upon and grow their technology skills and resources. Within days, Zoom, a cloud-based video and audio conferencing platform, became a favored way for educators to reach their entire classrooms, and Google Classroom became indispensable, but teachers also added layers of rich technology resources to the mix to make learning experiences as immersive as possible.

The following are just a few examples of how teachers in one school district, Houston County, sped into action, digitally, to keep their children engaged and on track:

Tiffany Caporale of Langston Road Elementary used Epic, a digital library, for reading assignments, and she split pupils into book clubs. She then used Google Classroom to provide them with interactive slides to take notes as they progressed in their readings. Zoom then came into play.

“When we come together for our book club discussion on Zoom, we kick off the meeting together and split into book club Zoom rooms (complete with student-annotated slides) to do a deep dive into the reading for the week,” said Caporale. “I facilitate by visiting with each club. Then we come back to the main Zoom to close out our time together! My students absolutely LOVE it! They beg to do book clubs!”

Jeremy Fermin at Veterans High School made the most of something that most of his students already have … a cell phone. “In my band classes, students upload videos of themselves playing their instruments. This way, I can hear each individual student play and provide direct, individualized feedback needed for each student to master their part,” said Fermin.

He uses the same technique when his students are not able to attend his live
Zoom sessions. "I record myself and upload the video to You Tube for any student who needs it," he said.

Cary Lord at Perry High offered her environmental science students a rich variety of content nestled in a fun scavenger hunt. "Online learning requires a great deal of reading for students, and it can be hard to motivate them to complete assignments that require reading lengthy articles," she said. "I thought having an assignment that included interesting videos and informative, easy-to-read infographics would make for a much more fun experience while learning about environmental issues related to agriculture. So, I chose to assign a scavenger hunt, as it allows students to explore some of the major environmental impacts that agriculture can have on ecosystems around the world," she said.

And Leslie Rees of Northside High, added an irresistible component to one of her weekly Zoom meetings with students. "I wanted to focus more on the emotional well-being of my students with that time, so I knew that I had to call on one of my personal development peeps in order to help," said Rees. Via Instagram, she contacted Trent Shelton, a former NFL player turned motivational speaker, and asked him if he would be a guest speaker on a Zoom call. "And guess what? He said yes!" she exclaimed.

According to Rees, "Trent took that precious time to talk one-on-one with my students and pour life into their soul. After the call, my students reached out to me and told me how much that Zoom call helped them process what was happening in the world around them. Trent then contacted me and told me that he was going to reach out to more teachers so that he could continue to be there for young people during this pandemic. It made my heart so happy to know that our students paved the way so that more students could be reached!"

Use Technology to Engage, But Make Instruction the Priority

By Nick Zomer, 2019-2020 PAGE President

Teachers often mistakenly design a lesson around a technology tool, but that's the opposite of good practice. Before planning what you want your students to do, identify what you want your students to know. Identify your standard, essential question and end goal. Then find a tool that fits your lesson.

Do you want students to communicate through a blog? Do you want them to work collaboratively via a wiki or other secure education environment? Would you prefer that they create visual evidence of their learning? Whatever the goal, make sure that the work reinforces the concepts you are teaching. Remember, there will not be questions about Twitter on the end-of-course tests. The instruction has to be the priority; technology is the engagement piece.

Go Deep and Stay the Course
Most students are tech-savvy, but don't make assumptions when it comes to instructional technology. Prior to making an assignment, immerse yourself in the technology and work through the logistics. You need to know enough to provide your students clear instructions about what you want them to achieve and point them in the right direction.

The difference between the lesson in your mind and the reality of its execution can be discouraging, but don't let that keep you from trying the technology again. As you use a tool, the challenges diminish. It is important, however, to be honest with yourself about what worked and what did not. Be willing to make another attempt with the resource on another day with an open mind. But be realistic. If you have tried to execute an idea with a particular resource multiple times, and each time you are ready to pull your hair out in frustration, then maybe it's not the way to go. If this happens to you, do not swear off trying new technology tools. Keep searching to find what works for you and, more importantly, for your students.

Nick Zomer, assistant principal of Creekland Middle School in Canton (Cherokee County), loves to experiment with technology, especially BYOT/BYLD. He holds a master's degree in integrating technology in the classroom from Walden University.
The ABCs of ‘Educationese’

One of the challenges with any new career is learning the vernacular of the field, and education is no different. In an effort to help you develop fluency in “Educationese,” PAGE has assembled a reference list of commonly used acronyms — some specific to the field of education and some general.

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All professionals expect to be held accountable for the quality of their work, and teachers are no exception. The implementation of the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) as Georgia’s evaluation system for classroom teachers has generated much hype and uncertainty around teacher evaluations, which can be nerve-wracking if not downright scary. Is your future in the hands of students’ decisions and abilities (or inabilities)? Will a single test score determine your pay? While policymakers are wrestling with such issues, teachers can avoid getting overly anxious about their evaluations by keeping a few pointers in mind.

- **It’s rarely as bad as the hype.** Humans can be excitable creatures. Rumors abound, truths get distorted and well, you know the rest. Do your best to tune out the gossip and distill the truths from the abundance of information floating around. TKES includes a mandatory orientation and familiarity component to introduce you to the process. You should also talk with your principal or immediate supervisor in advance of your first observation. Allow them the opportunity to set your mind at ease. They want you to succeed as much as you do. No administrator wants a “failing” teacher. They will eagerly spell out what they will be looking for and how to demonstrate it.

- **New teachers, in coordination with their administration, establish a Professional Learning Plan as part of the evaluation process.** The plan may include your individual professional goals, school improvement goals, district improvement goals or any other district- or school-identified need.

- **View the evaluation as an opportunity for professional feedback, not a pass/fail exam.** If you have a weak point (and who among us doesn’t?), you want that pointed out so that you can take steps to shore up that particular skill. After all, our students are the ultimate beneficiaries of our competencies. If your evaluator identifies an area for improvement, don’t panic. Discuss it and ask for advice on how to develop that skill. Ask your supervisor to recommend veteran teachers who have expertise in that area with whom you can observe and confer.

- **Be sure you get credit for everything you do.** TKES allows for teachers to provide evidence of a skill not observed. If an evaluator identifies a “needs improvement” area because they did not see you meet a particular standard, you can provide artifacts after the observation that show that you met it.

- **Keep calm and carry on.** While we certainly must be cognizant of what is required of us and meet those requirements, those who have been in education for decades realize that seasons come and seasons go. Changes come and can be challenging, but at the end of the day, the sky never falls as people predict. Seek the advice of quality mentors, do what is required and enjoy the magic of teaching!
As the new school year begins, there is always an excitement, especially for new teachers. However, along with the excitement comes some apprehension about the unknown. What if you get a student who occasionally exhibits violent behavior? What if a parent is overly protective of his or her child and would not hesitate to file a lawsuit against you for the slightest slipup on your part? Or, what if you have a new principal who scrutinizes and second-guesses everything you do?

To help you avoid legal problems, follow this advice:

• Report suspected child abuse in writing within 24 hours of the time you first have reason to believe that a student in your care has been abused. Keep a copy of that report for your records. In most Georgia counties, you are to report the suspected abuse to a designated authority in your school. (In Fulton County, you must report it to DFCS.) Check your school’s written policy. “Child abuse” means physical injury or death inflicted upon a child by a parent or caretaker by other than accidental means; neglect or exploitation of a child by a parent or caretaker; sexual abuse of a child; or sexual exploitation of a child.

• Report all incidents of bullying in writing as soon possible: physical, mental or cyber. Keep a copy of that report for your records.

• Do not permit a student to be alone with you in a closed area. Furthermore, do not drive a student home from an after-school event unless absolutely necessary, and even then, always have another person in the car with you. If at all possible, secure written permission from an administrator.

• Force against a student may not be used unless it is absolutely necessary to defend yourself or protect someone else from injury.

• Do not leave your class unattended, especially if a fight has started between students. In case of such emergencies, have a designated student in your class go to the front office for assistance. Teachers have a duty to exercise proper supervision over students in their classes and reasonable care to prevent injury to them.

• Corporal punishment may only be administered by the principal or the principal’s designee and authorized by written policy adopted by the school board. Even if you are authorized to administer corporal punishment, strict guidelines must be followed.

• Do not search a student’s body (i.e., “strip search”) even if you believe you have probable cause that warrants a search. In almost every case, strip searches of students are found to be a violation of students’ Fourth Amendment rights.

• Do not change a young child’s underwear or diapers unless another adult is present.

• Follow the chain of command if you have a complaint. First, go to your immediate supervisor, and then move up the chain of command.

• Do not tutor one of your students for compensation.

• Keep accurate records and receipts in the collection and disbursement of school monies (for example, school clubs or athletic events).

• Always maintain a professional relationship with students, even if they may be close to your age. Do not have a relationship with a student outside of school or school activities.

• Do not establish electronic relationships with students through email, text or social media that do not relate directly to school. Any use of electronic communication with students should first be approved by your administrator.
One of the most important areas of school law in Georgia is the Professional Standard Commission’s implementation and interpretation of the Code of Ethics for Educators. The Code of Ethics defines the required professional behavior of educators. All educators in Georgia, from paraprofessionals to superintendents, hold a license issued to them by the PSC. Failure to follow the Code of Ethics can result in the PSC issuing sanctions against an educator’s certificate.

The Code of Ethics consists of 10 standards of conduct. It is imperative for educators — not those just newly certified — to maintain familiarity with all 10 standards. While some unethical conduct is very clear (i.e., don’t become romantically involved with a student), there are seemingly murkier areas where educators often have the right intentions, but those intentions lead to the wrong results. Two areas that pose potential minefields for educators are handling Individualized Education Program documents and mandated reporting of child abuse.

Individualized Education Program Documents
An IEP document is a federally mandated document for children with special needs and/or learning disabilities. Generally, an IEP document identifies the student and his/her disability, and it includes accommodations that the school must implement in order for the child to be successful. IEPs are governed by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

There are several mistakes in the IEP process that may result in a sanction from the PSC. First, drafting, revising, updating or amending an IEP requires an IEP meeting. This meeting involves the parent(s), student, special education teacher, regular education teacher and administrator. At the end of the meeting, each person involved signs off on the IEP. Do not sign an IEP document without having an IEP meeting with everyone in the room at the same time. Sporadic contact, such as phone calls to parents regarding the IEP, emails among faculty members about the IEP, or discussing the case outside of the IEP meeting, does not constitute the actual IEP meeting. No educator should sign his/her name unless he/she was actually in the meeting with all of the others present. Such action, in the eyes of the PSC, constitutes dishonest conduct under Standard 4.

Failure to implement the IEP does not always constitute unethical conduct; however, it could result in the parent filing a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education. For example, if the IEP mandates that a student must have all assessments read aloud to him/her, then this must happen, even if the student indicates that he/she wishes to waive the right. While this may not be considered unethical conduct, it could result in adverse employment action, such as a reprimand, termination or non-renewal.

Required Reporting of Child Abuse
Georgia law mandates that all school employees are required reporters of child abuse. Ethically, this is codified as Standard 8. If you suspect that a child has been abused, you must report your suspicions in writing within 24 hours. Most school systems in Georgia require that an educator submit this report to someone at the school, such as a school counselor or administrator. Some school systems require educators to report directly to the Department of Family and Children Services. Regardless, it is important for all educators to familiarize themselves with the reporting procedures of their respective district at the beginning of the school year.

Failure to report child abuse often results in the PSC issuing severe sanctions, particularly when a child has been harmed after the educator became aware of the abuse. Because of the criminal component of the reporting statute, several Georgia educators have been arrested for failure to report. Educators who file mandated reports should also keep thorough documentation regarding the report.

Do not sign an IEP document without having an IEP meeting with everyone in the room at the same time. Sporadic contact, such as phone calls to parents regarding the IEP, emails among faculty members about the IEP, or discussing the case outside of the IEP meeting, does not constitute the actual IEP meeting.
Legal Rights & Responsibilities of Georgia Educators

By Jill Hay, PAGE General Counsel

Contracts
Educators must have a signed contract of employment to teach in a Georgia school system. Contracts are binding agreements between an educator and the state or local employer. A contract can be terminated by:
- Mutual agreement, which means by resignation of the employee and acceptance of the resignation by the employer; or
- Dismissal from employment for cause.
Resigning without the employer’s consent constitutes breach of contract and abandonment of position. In such cases, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission may sanction one’s teaching certificate and the school system may pursue legal action for breach of contract or seek liquidated damages — if permitted by the contract.

Tenured and Non-tenured Employees
Contracts have a one-year term; there is no guarantee that you will be offered a new contract. That situation changes if the educator has signed four consecutive, full-year, full-time teaching contracts in the same school system; or if the employer has failed to notify the employee of non-renewal of contract for the fourth year by May 15. Once the employee has signed a fourth, full-year, full-time consecutive contract by the same employer, he or she enjoys “tenure,” which means that the school system must renew your contract year after year, unless good cause for non-renewal can be shown.
If a tenured employee transfers to a different school system, the time needed to become tenured in the new system is shortened to one year plus the acceptance of a second-consecutive contract; or if the employer failed to notify the employee of nonrenewal of contract for the second-consecutive year by May 15.
A school system can choose to non-renew the contract of a non-tenured teacher by sending written notification of non-renewal by May 15. Upon the request of a non-renewed employee, state law requires local systems give a written explanation for the reasons of non-renewal.

Termination and Suspension
An educator may have his or her contract terminated or suspended for the following reasons: incompetency; insubordination; willful neglect of duties; immorality; inciting, encouraging or counseling students to violate any valid state law, municipal ordinance or policy or rule of the local board of education; reducing staff due to loss of students or cancellation of programs; failure to secure and maintain necessary educational training; or any other good and sufficient cause. A suspension without pay must be preceded by formal charges and a hearing. A temporary relief from duties is always given with pay and occurs when the educator’s alleged conduct is of such a nature that his or her continued presence in the classroom or administrative office is indefensible. In the case of temporary relief from duties, a hearing to adjudicate the charges must be made available to the educator within 10 working days after he or she has been relieved from duty.
Insubordination is the willful nonadherence to a reasonable direct order issued by a proper authority. More often than not, insubordination and willful neglect of duty go hand in hand.

School Board Records
Pursuant to the Georgia Open Records Law, all state, county and municipal records, except exempted records, are open for inspection by any Georgia citizen. The person in charge of the records has up to three business days to determine whether a requested record is accessible under the law.
Records not subject to public disclosure include the following:
- Records that reveal a public school employee’s home address, home phone number, Social Security number, insurance or medical information.
- Performance evaluation records. (Performance evaluations shall not be transferred to another employer or potential employer, unless authorized in writing by the person who was evaluated.); and
- Confidential evaluations/references submitted in connection with the hiring of an employee. The right of privacy extends only to freedom from unnecessary public scrutiny. It does not protect a legitimate inquiry into the operation of a government and those employed by it.

Note about Charter and Strategic Waiver systems: Charter Systems/Schools are exempt from most Title 20 Georgia public education laws. Strategic Waiver School Systems may also waive some laws. If you teach in one of these schools, consult your system’s local policies and procedures as the above listed information may not apply in your district.
A Dozen Documents to Keep

Whether it is a traditional manila file folder or digital files, make sure to keep important personal and professional records. Such documents provide a clear history and proof of your professional experience and development. Your career may span many years in many locations, and in our hectic society, a key document may be difficult to track down when you need it most.

The following are a dozen document types to keep safely on hand:

1. **College transcripts from every college you attended**: K-12 systems often require that universities send an official transcript directly to them, but a student copy can assist you in completing applications and employment-related papers.

2. **GACE, Praxis or Graduate Record Examination scores**: Obtaining copies of test scores later can be time consuming and expensive.

3. **Letters of recommendation**: Letters of recommendation from principals and peer teachers document your on-the-job performance and are important in determining future career opportunities.

4. **Teaching contracts**: A copy of each signed contract is important because it verifies your employment with a school system and your length of service.

5. **Payroll records**: Pay stubs and tax documents issued by your school system record your salary, as well as your tax deductions, retirement plan, Social Security contributions and insurance costs.

6. **Sick leave**: These records show how much remaining sick leave you have available before deductions are taken from your salary. In Georgia schools, two years of sick leave may be accumulated and used toward retirement upon completion of 28 years of service.

7. **Evaluations and professional development plans**: Retain all documents pertaining to your performance evaluations, responsibilities and employment status, including commendations or recommendations. If you have formally disagreed with any part of an evaluation or professional development plan, attach a copy of your written response to the file.

8. **Major correspondence from district administrators**: Letters of appointments to committees, positions of leadership or recognition help build a strong résumé.

9. **Copies (or at least computer screen shots) of conference or workshop programs listing you as a presenter/contributor**: This résumé-boosting documentation will improve your accuracy and confidence in citing your participation.

10. **Activities, accomplishments and awards**: Keep a running list of in-service training, subject specialization, classes/subjects taught, extracurricular responsibilities, special skills and honors/awards. It will make updating your résumé a breeze.

11. **Records of severe student matters**: These records concern any major student problem that involves hearings and/or court proceedings.

12. **PAGE membership**: A current PAGE membership provides you with liability coverage and immediate access to legal advice.
Lean In, Georgia Educators:
Educators Must Be the Most Vocal Advocates of Public Education

By Meg Thornton, PAGE Publications Editor

State laws impact all aspects of your work as a Georgia public schools educator — from compensation and benefits, to testing, evaluation, curriculum, class size and rules of conduct. State funding and regulations also determine whether Georgia’s children are afforded an education that fuels lifelong stability and achievement.

Given the massive power and reach of legislation, Georgia educators must continually take an active role in shaping education policy. Lawmakers making education decisions are rarely educators, so they need to hear from us — they need our insight to understand the impact of their decisions on us and, more importantly, on our students.

People who don’t vote lose their voice in government, yet many Georgia public school educators do not exercise their right to vote. Until many more educators participate in this critical civic responsibility, the governor and legislators will continue to insist that we need to do more with much, much less. With continuing attacks on educator rights and benefits, it is more important than ever to be politically active.

Furthermore, how can educators who are not even registered to vote encourage students to vote? The best educators practice what they preach.

If the past decade has taught us anything, it is that we cannot simply expect that Georgia K–12 education will be appropriately funded. In addition to billions of dollars in education budget cuts, the number of children living in poverty has soared, making Georgia the sixth-poorest state in the nation.

PAGE brings the message of public education to the General Assembly each and every day, but that alone is not enough. Educators must be the most vocal advocates of public education. We keep folks informed about what is going on at the Capitol and when it is important to contact your legislator about an important upcoming vote. The bottom line is that it is important for lawmakers to hear from you on key education issues.
Earn an A+ in Advocacy

Follow these steps to influence policy and make a big difference in Georgia public education:

- Register to vote. It’s simple. Register online via the Georgia Secretary of State’s office; there’s a link on the PAGE website (pageinc.org) in the “Legislation” section. You may also register at your local library or when you renew your driver’s license.

- Stay abreast of key legislation issues impacting education in Georgia. Visit pageinc.org to sign up today for the PAGE legislative newsletter delivered to your personal email address.

- Learn about the candidates and their positions on education issues. Know if the elected officials serving your area are voting with the best interests of students in mind. Again, PAGE legislative emails are a great starting point.

- Reach out regularly to your representatives. Voice your opinion based on your experience as a Georgia educator. Simply identify yourself, note your role in education, and briefly and professionally state why you oppose or support a bill.

- Know election dates and be sure to vote. Voting early is easy and convenient. Mark your calendar for early voting dates in your district.

- Inform others of important education issues, and urge others to register and vote on behalf of education.

In recent years, Georgia educators have come out in force for the annual PAGE Day on Capitol Hill, co-sponsored with GAEL and GACTE. In fact, educator calls and emails played a major role in convincing lawmakers to reduce standardized testing and educator evaluation requirements.
As a new teacher years ago, I learned the value of building relationships with school support personnel — secretaries, custodians, cafeteria workers and bus drivers. While teachers and administrators are highly visible in schools, support personnel make the school function smoothly. Another valuable relationship to build is with your PAGE member services representative (MSR). We provide Georgia educators with real-time connections to legal, legislative and member services, and we foster professional relationships with every staff member in our schools to show how much we value the work you do on behalf of Georgia students.

New teacher orientation usually provides the first opportunity to meet your PAGE MSR. Throughout Georgia, 14 MSRs and their consultants attend orientations and often sponsor snacks to welcome new teachers to their system. Attendees often ask about upgrading their PAGE student membership or transferring their PAGE professional membership from another school system. New teachers, please remember that once you have signed your employment contract, your PAGE student membership must be upgraded to professional status to maintain liability coverage.

During the school year, you’ll likely see your PAGE MSR at a faculty meeting or at a meet-and-greet session. Please become acquainted with your MSR. He or she always has useful “freebies” as well as important information regarding legislation, the State Health Benefit Plan, the Professional Standards Commission, the Teachers Retirement System and more.

You might also see your MSR accompanying a PAGE attorney for a code of ethics presentation in your system or school. We provide these sessions at no cost to the school, and we welcome your questions. It’s also a good idea to have your MSRs contact information handy. While MSRs do not provide legal advice, they can assist you in contacting one of the six PAGE staff attorneys. And you always can call PAGE yourself. The legal department is available during business hours, but if you are unable to speak with someone directly, an assistant can arrange to have your call returned after hours.

During the legislative session, the PAGE legislative team provides the “Capitol Report,” a summary of education legislation. Throughout the year, PAGE reports on meetings of groups that influence salary, retirement, insurance or certification. PAGE MSRs forward this information to school building contacts, who forward it to PAGE members. You may receive reports directly by signing up for them at www.pageinc.org. And in mid-February of each year, PAGE sponsors PAGE/GAEL/GACTE Day on Capitol Hill, a time to hear from House and Senate education leaders and to meet with your senator or representative personally. You also might see a PAGE MSR teaching a high school class in the Early Childhood Education or Teaching as a Profession pathway. After all, most PAGE MSRs are former classroom teachers.

Finally, in a time when teachers often are taken for granted, PAGE believes that you and your colleagues provide Georgia families with unparalleled services. One of the many ways we like to acknowledge that is with treats. So, if your “chocolate first-aid kit” needs to be restocked, look no further than your PAGE MSR. We know that sometimes chocolate is the best medicine.
The following is the 2019-2020 salary schedule; the 2020-2021 schedule was not adopted by press time.

**Georgia Annual/Monthly Salary Schedule for 10 Months Employment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF CERTIFICATION</th>
<th>PROV</th>
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<th>T-4</th>
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<tr>
<td>BASE</td>
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**Understanding the Teacher Salary Schedule**

Georgia teacher salary schedule is based on years of certifiable full-time educational experience and years of creditable experience. The “L” stands for “level.” The “E” stands for “entry.” The state salary schedule represents the minimum salary for each certification level based on education and years of creditable experience. The base salary at each certification level is the salary paid by Salary Step E. Teachers who reach Salary Step 7 remain at that level for two years before reaching the L1 step (although they may receive state or local pay raises). The T-1 level and annual base salary ($35,217.00) is for beginning teachers with a four-year degree who enter the workforce in the fall of 2019. Beginning teachers with a four-year degree who enter the workforce in the fall of 2019 will start at the T-1 level and earn $37,092 for 10 months. The smaller figure is the yearly pay divided by 12 so that teachers receive a paycheck over the summer. Columns 1 and 2 list the years of creditable experience. The larger figure in each column is the salary. Column 3 lists the years of creditable experience. The smaller figure in each column is the salary. If you’re a beginning teacher, you will almost certainly earn the base salary at each certification level. The T-2 level represents the state minimum salary for each certification level based on education and creditable experience. The larger figure in each column is the salary. The state minimum salary for each certification level based on education and creditable experience is 94.5% of the state minimum salary. The “L” stands for the level at which teachers receive a pay raise.  Determining the years of creditable experience is based on years of full-time educational experience plus years of creditable experience. The state minimum salary for each certification level based on education and creditable experience represents the minimum that must be paid to teachers. Some school districts add a local supplement set by the local board of education.
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  - Coaching
  - ESOL
  - K-5 Math
  - Reading
  - Gifted†
  - STEM
  - Curriculum and Instruction, Ph.D.

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* Does not lead to initial certification or certification upgrades
** Offered through Mercer University’s College of Professional Advancement
† Pending approval by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC)

Meets requirements for provisionally-certified teachers seeking induction certificates

NO APPLICATION FEE
NO GRE OR MAT REQUIRED

FALL 2020

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