Tch Teaching Channel

Back to School Starter Pack: Middle (6-8)

Classroom Setup Checklist

☐ **Purge and clean**
Which areas need the most attention?

☐ **Room layout**
How will you design your classroom?

☐ **Desk arrangement**
How can your seating arrangement reflect how you want students to act?

☐ **Organize library**
How can you arrange books for easy access and readability?

☐ **Organize materials**
How to make materials easy to find and use?

☐ **Think about systems**
How can systems help you stay organized?

☐ **Set up your work area**
How can you make the most of work time?

☐ **Decorate**
How can you make your classroom inviting?

Lesson/Unit Planning Checklist

☐ **Come up with a system**
How will you record your lessons?

☐ **Decide routines**
What daily and weekly routines will affect your plans?

☐ **Align to standards**
What standards do your lessons need to address?

☐ **Think about how to share plans with students**
How will students know what they're expected to learn?

☐ **Plan for the first few weeks**
How can you plan lessons to help create a positive class culture?

☐ **Long-term planning**
How can you create a plan for the year?

☐ **Share with families**
How can you share your plans?

☐ **Enrich planning with colleagues**
How can you engage in collaborative planning?

Class Culture Checklist

☐ **Reflect and envision**
How do you see your classroom?

☐ **Pick a focus**
Is there an area you want to explore more deeply?

☐ **Think about norms**
What practices and routines do you imagine for your classroom?

☐ **Think about family communication**
How will you share class culture with your families?

☐ **Plan the first two weeks of school**
How will you use the first two weeks of school to to build culture?

Self-Care Checklist

☐ **Prep your teacher survival stash**
What items do you need to make it through the day?

☐ **Make a schedule**
What will you do each day before and after school?

☐ **Find some buddies**
How can colleagues get you through the day?

☐ **Decide what's important**
What will you prioritize this year?

☐ **Plan for feeling overwhelmed**
How will you cope with moments of stress?

☐ **Plan for fun**
How will you bring joy to your classroom and beyond every day?

Classroom Setup

1. Purge and clean: Which areas need the most attention?

It's time to get ready for the new school year. But where do you begin? Whether you're coming back to your old classroom or entering a new one, start by looking at the room with new eyes. Take a walk to notice the state of the environment and think about which areas need purging and cleaning. Before you can set up for this year, try to get rid of anything you don't need. And remember to save some of your cleaning supplies for when your students arrive. You often need a stash of air freshener in a middle school classroom!

RESOURCES

- Check out our Pinterest board to inspire you to clear the clutter out of your classroom.
- Having trouble letting go of some things? Read this post by Eat.Write.Teach. to learn how to use the KonMari method in your classroom.
- Check out these ideas for DIY air fresheners on Pinterest.

2. Room layout: How will you design your classroom?

Now that your classroom is clean, it's time to envision how you'd like it to be. Think about how you'll set up student desks, your desk, student materials, books, teacher resources, etc. In addition, consider where the main walkways will be and how traffic will flow around your classroom. Consider drawing a sketch of your classroom or even using paper cutouts to see what it would look like to move around different components of your room. Browse images of other teachers' classrooms, and even tour your own school building to see what your colleagues are up to.

RESOURCES

- Watch our Facebook Live videos to see how these teachers set up their classrooms — a regular classroom and a co-teaching space — to best meet the needs of ELL students.

- Think about [creating a space](#) that matches your ideal class culture.
- Get inspired by another educator's classroom makeover. Read this [blog post](#) for a middle school classroom tour.

3. Desk arrangement: How can your seating arrangement reflect how you want students to act?

You've got a general idea of your classroom layout, so now it's time to turn your attention to desks or tables. How will your students sit? Think about how your desk arrangements can encourage the type of learning you're hoping to see. If you'd like students to learn to work in small groups, for example, consider seating them in groups of four.

RESOURCES

- Look at this [Pinterest board](#) for ideas on setting up desks.
- Watch [this video](#) to see how one high school teacher set up desks to encourage collaboration.
- See how one teacher turned his desks into [conversation pieces](#).

4. Organize your library: How can you arrange books for easy access and readability?

Reading happens across all subject areas, so whether you teach history, science, or math, your classroom most likely has some sort of library. How can you make books look appealing *and* create a system where they're easy to find? How will you address and invite different reading levels? Do you have a reference collection? Will you have an area where they can sit and read? Even middle schoolers love reading nooks!

RESOURCES

- Browse these [classroom library ideas](#) to see how other teachers have set up their libraries for success.
- Don't have a classroom library? Read Pernille Ripp's [blog post](#) about building one and why they're important, even in middle school classrooms.

5. Organize materials: How can you make materials easy to find and use?

You need so much stuff to make a classroom run smoothly. Most classrooms need art supplies, like markers, scissors, and paper. Depending on the subject you teach, you may need simple calculators or extensive laboratory supplies. And what about tech supplies, like laptops or iPads? Where do you put them all? It can seem overwhelming. But thinking through where materials will go can save you future headaches.

RESOURCES

- Look at these organization hacks that will help you make the most of your classroom space.
- Check out this Pinterest board for ideas on tech storage.

6. Think about systems: How can systems help you stay organized?

Now that you know where the materials in your classroom will go, it's time to think about how students will interact with them. Think about how you will hand out materials, how you will collect homework, and how students will move around the classroom. What routines can you put into place to help your classroom stay organized?

RESOURCES

- See how one teacher made seating arrangements with work stations so that students could have materials right next to them.
- Google docs can be a great way to organize materials, even physical ones. Read this blog to see how one educator uses Google Sheets.

7. Set up your work area: How can you make the most of work time?

Once you've made a plan for student materials, it's time to attack all the materials that you'll need. What kind of file system will you use? Or will you be paperless? How will you keep track of student work? Think about arranging your work area to help your work time be as productive as possible.

RESOURCES

- Create less clutter at your desk by going digital. Watch how one teacher does just that.
- Want to really cut the clutter? Read this post for ideas on ditching your desk altogether.
- Read how Tch Laureate Josh Parker cleans up his desktop and other teacher spaces.

8. Decorate: How can you make your classroom inviting?

Here comes the fun part: decorating! Think about how to make your classroom a welcoming space. You're going to be spending a lot of time there, so you want to make your room as comfortable as it can be. Think about how to use the walls: will you keep them empty to fill with student work or will you post pictures or posters?

RESOURCES

See how one teacher uses her classroom walls as a teaching tool.
As the year goes on, consider using student art work to make your school a living museum (or use art from previous students!).

Watch our Facebook Live Classroom Tours to see how teachers of newcomers use the walls as language learning tools in math and social studies classrooms.

For more resources, be sure to explore our Setting Up Your Classroom Deep Dive.

Lesson/Unit Planning

1. Come up with a system: How will you record your lessons?

Before you start lesson planning, think about *how* you'll plan. What kind of format will you use? Will you keep a physical plan book or keep track of them virtually? Consider whether your school requires you to submit your lesson plans or use a particular structure. Consult any pacing guides and find a place to keep all the materials you'll need when lesson planning.

RESOURCES
- Check out this list of ten lesson planning templates and resources.
- Think about planning as a learning opportunity by considering the power of writing down your lessons.
- Read about how you can save time and energy while planning purposeful lessons.

2. Decide on routines: What daily and weekly routines will affect your plans?

Now that you've considered how you'll plan, think about the daily and weekly routines that you'll need to plan around. In your plan book, note when you'll have each class, prep periods, and any school-wide activities. Now think about your classroom routines. Will you start each class with a warmup or Do Now? Will all your lessons end with an exit slip? What tools and routines will you use throughout your lessons? Think about the structures you'll need to include in your daily plans.

RESOURCES
- Read Five Ways to Start Your Lessons and Five Ways to Close a Lesson for examples of starting and closing routines.
- Discover ideas for student engagement routines in this video.

- [Read](#) why it's important to consider yourself the lead learner of your classroom.

3. Align to standards: What standards do your lessons need to address?

Whether state or national, chances are there are some standards you're held accountable for addressing. When planning your lessons, make sure you're addressing applicable standards. Consult pacing guides for your curricula and see how you can weave connections to the standards into the lessons you plan.

RESOURCES
- Sarah Brown Wessling shares how to ["skinny" the standards](#) to make them easier to use and understand.
- Looking to learn more about the Common Core? Check out [this video](#) about learning to read the standards.
- Watch [this video](#) to learn more about the Next Generation Science Standards.

4. Think about how to share plans with students: How will students know what they're expected to learn?

After figuring out what you'll need to teach, think about how you'll share your plans with students. Consider posting goals, essential questions, or objectives in your classroom. Make sure to introduce and discuss the goals with your students so they have a clear understanding of what's expected of them. Think about ways you'll keep students on track with assignments, projects, and due dates.

RESOURCES
- Watch how one teacher [helps her students understand the goals](#) for each lesson.
- Use tech tools when planning. Learn how you can use [hyperdocs](#) and [playlists](#) to communicate, differentiate, and transform your teaching.
- Watch how Tch Laureate Sean McComb uses a workshop model in his lesson planning to make learning [personalized](#).

5. Plan for the first few weeks: How can you plan lessons to help create a positive class culture?

As you think about what your students will do in the first few weeks of school, try to focus more on culture than content. You'll have the whole year to teach content, and a strong class culture will make everything easier. As you're planning, cross check your lesson plans with ideas you generate in the Class Culture checklist.

RESOURCES
- Think about the [unique classroom culture](#) you'd like to create.
- See how one middle school teacher starts off her school year with [important routines built into her lessons](#).

- Look at the sample first week lessons in The First Six Weeks of School from Responsive Classroom.

6. Long-term planning: How can you create a plan for the year?

Planning for the day-to-day is hard, but planning for the long-term can actually make it easier. When you have solid long-term plans, daily lessons are easier to create and execute. Again, refer back to your curricula and pacing guides. Think about your school's calendar and any other important events to plan around. Then work to create a year-long plan (or as far out as you can get!). And, remember to leave a little room for flexibility, because once you get to know your students, you'll want to think about their interests and be responsive to their needs as well.

RESOURCES

- Listen to Sarah Brown Wessling talk about the importance of class culture and essential questions when you're long-term planning.
- Check out these resources for completed lesson and unit plans to use as inspiration.
- Need to align units to Common Core? Use these steps and tools to help you plan.

7. Share with families: How can you share your plans?

You have your plans figured out, but how do you share them with your students' families? Think about creating a newsletter or blog to keep your classroom community informed. Back-to-School Night can be a great place to introduce your pacing plan/yearly calendar. Cross- check your plans here with your Class Culture checklist ideas.

RESOURCES

- Read about how engaging families can strengthen communities.
- Use the insight in this post to help you confidently navigate all types of parent communication.
- This blog post has a great tutorial on creating personalized newsletters.

8. Enrich your planning with colleagues: How can you engage in collaborative planning?

Sure, we can plan on our own. But what fun is that? Collaborating with colleagues makes planning more fun and more effective. Find colleagues that you can brainstorm with and bounce ideas off of. Consider dividing up planning tasks to make your loads a little lighter.

RESOURCES

- Get ideas from this video playlist that highlights the way two teachers closely align their curriculum.

- Collaboration doesn't have to happen just at your school site. Watch how cross-school teams come together to support teacher inquiry.
- Want to try co-teaching this year? Read about the benefits of co-teaching in this post.

Class Culture

1. Reflect and envision: How do you see your classroom?

Before you can even think about how you'll build your class culture, you need to imagine it. If you're a new teacher, think about everything you've seen and read so far. Whose classrooms would you like to emulate? If you're a veteran teacher, think about last year. What did you like about the culture you built with your students? What would you change? As you're thinking about these ideas, write them down. You'll later be co-creating goals with your students, but it's important to start with your own goals. Once you have them down, make sure to cross check your class culture goals with your classroom setup plan.

RESOURCES:
- Watch a few videos on class culture for ideas.
- Listen to Sarah Brown Wessling discuss how she thinks about class culture at the start of school.
- Read about ways you can create a more democratic classroom this year.

2. Pick a focus: Is there an area you want to explore more deeply?

Now that you have a vision of your class culture in mind, think about an area you'd like to explore more deeply this year. Is there something specific about class culture you'd like to get better at? Or is there a focus you feel your students might really need? For instance, perhaps you'd really like to help your students develop growth mindsets? Or, maybe you'd like to focus more on social emotional learning this year? Explore some areas of focus, pick one, and start to plan out how you'll work on related goals.

RESOURCES
- Get ideas from this video playlist that highlights the focus areas of growth mindset, social emotional learning, relationship building, and routines.

- Check out our blog series on social justice and equity in the classroom for more class culture focus ideas.

3. Think about norms: What practices and routines do you imagine for your classroom?

With your class culture vision and focus area in mind, start to think of what you'd like your class norms to be. What practices and routines do you hope your students will follow? Think big, like helping students be respectful and accountable. But also think about the small but important things, like bathroom procedures or turning in work. Of course, you'll want to give students ownership of these norms by co-creating them (and middle schoolers will certainly have a lot to say about norms!). But it's a good idea to have your own ideas before stepping inside the classroom, since the norms will help you achieve your class culture vision.

RESOURCES

- Think about classroom culture as part of your management strategy in the blog Classroom Culture vs. Classroom Management.
- See how classroom norms help build class culture.
- Learn about using contracts for class norms with your students.
- Read about smart classroom management strategies you can try this year.

4. Think about family communication: How will you share your class culture with families?

It's important to make sure your students' families understand the culture you're trying to build in your classroom so that they can continue the work at home. Most likely, your middle schoolers won't report back on the great class culture you'll be working to build, so it's important to have a communication plan. How will you present class culture at Back-to-School Night? How will you continue to communicate throughout the year? Will you use a class website, newsletter, or an app?

RESOURCES

- Read Common Sense Media's post to see if one of these options might work for you.
- Start planning how you'll communicate class culture with these tips on structuring your Back-to-School event.
- Check out this Pinterest board with lots of family letter examples and templates to explore.

5. Plan class culture building for the first two weeks: How will you use the first two weeks of school to build culture?

While you may feel an urgency to get to your content curriculum right away, time spent building class culture the first two weeks of school will end up giving you more content time

in the long run. A strong class culture makes deep learning possible! So make sure to infuse a lot of class culture activities into your first two weeks of school.

RESOURCES

The [First Six Weeks of School](#) from Responsive Classroom provides excellent advice on building a positive class culture. It even gives you a sample first-two-weeks lesson plan for grades five and six that can easily be adapted to all middle grades.
[Connect your class culture goals](#) with first [month](#) of school activities, as well as during the rest of the year.

For more resources, be sure to explore our [Class Culture Deep Dive](#).

Self-Care

1. Prep your teacher survival stash: What items do you need to make it through the day?

Before your teaching year begins and life gets hectic, prep a stash of items that you can reach for on a daily basis or when times get tough. Make sure to keep it in a secure place, such as a locked cabinet or drawer. This spot can hold your purse or wallet, but it should also hold essentials: breath mints or mouthwash, any medicine you may need, lip balm, hand lotion, extra deodorant, etc. Also, think of items that can get you through a hard day, like your favorite candy or anything that will bring a smile to your face. And remember to keep the stash stocked throughout the year!

RESOURCES

- Check out this [Pinterest board](#) for fun ideas for your teacher survival kit.

2. Make a schedule: What will you do each day before and after school?

While your teaching schedule is usually set for you, how you use the rest of each day is not. Making a schedule for that time helps keep your sanity! Are there days you need to stay late for meetings? Are there days you can leave earlier? Can you exercise after school, or do something else for the mind and body? Is there a day you want to stay late for planning or assessing? Do you want to set a day for conferring with students after school? If you set this schedule ahead of time, you'll thank yourself later. Just as your students appreciate routines and norms, so will you!

RESOURCES

- Tch Laureate Crystal Morey gives important advice for [protecting and scheduling your time](#).
- Check out these [ten tips](#) on how teachers can improve their work-life balance.

- The start of school can sometimes feel chaotic. Read this post for tips on surviving the madness.

3. Find some buddies: How can colleagues get you through the day?

If you've been teaching for a while, you probably have colleagues you can turn to for advice, snacks, or tissues! You may even have collaboration partners for planning and curriculum. But maybe you've changed schools, or you're a brand new teacher. Maybe there is a new teacher next door to you. Take some time before the school year begins to get to know your colleagues and make a plan to support each other, whether that simply means eating lunch together daily or collaborating on curriculum. Although teaching can feel like independent work once you close the classroom door, collaborating can make the year so much better!

RESOURCES

- The benefits of teacher collaboration are many, but some of the most important are the gains in teacher growth as shown in this video.
- Building Coaching Relationships is a video about coaching relationships, but there's great advice here for all professional relationships.
- Tch Laureate Crystal Morey came to appreciate trusting others after reading author Nan Russell.

4. Decide on what's important: What will you prioritize this year?

As a teacher, there is a never-ending list of what you could be doing, but the fact is, you can't do it all without burning out. At the start of the school year, it's a good idea to set some priorities. What are the most important things for you to focus on in your teaching this year? Then, make a plan. A plan might be for hacking new ways of doing things to save time for other items, or it might be to take a deep dive into one area during the year so you can get better at it.

RESOURCES

- Check out Tch Laureate Sean McComb's Hacking Feedback series to learn how he made giving feedback easier and more effective at the same time.
- Discover how to set and work towards effective instructional priorities.

5. Plan for feeling overwhelmed: How will you cope with moments of stress?

In step four, you made a plan to limit your areas of focus so you don't burn out. That's great! But it doesn't mean moments of stress can be completely avoided. Acknowledge the fact that there will be overwhelming days and have a plan ready to put into action. It's better to be prepared than caught off guard.

RESOURCES

- Have Sarah Brown Wessling's [5-Day Reboot](#) in your pocket and ready to go when needed.
- [Read this post](#) to remind yourself that you can't do it all, and that's okay!
- Read Sarah Brown Wessling's heartfelt [letter to her children](#) to remind yourself just how important and beautiful the work of teaching can be.

6. Plan for fun: How will you bring joy to your classroom and beyond every day?

Finally, before the school year begins, think about how you can bring joy to your life (and thus to those around you) on a daily basis. How can you have fun with your students each day? How can you do something fun for yourself each day? How can you infuse joy into teaching and learning? A simple sticky note with "have fun" written on it might be all it takes to remind yourself to take time to laugh and smile each day.

RESOURCES

- Read Tch Laureate Crystal Morey's advice on [remembering to have fun](#).
- Watch this video to see how [simple games](#) make learning fun for your middle schoolers.
- Focusing can be fun too. Watch this video to see how [guided relaxation](#) can be used by you and your students.