

## The Key to Classroom Organization

A sharp, well-maintained classroom sends so many wonderful and powerful messages to students—from an expectation of excellence to personal pride in their work habits. It's a slam-dunk, sure-fire, easy way to improve behavior in your classroom.

Yet, remarkably, classroom organization is an area typically overlooked.

In most classrooms, you'll find books and materials cluttering the room, hodgepodge jumbled here and there, cabinets bursting at the seams, and papers and teaching guides stacked atop the teacher's desk.

Undoubtedly, student work areas, too, look the same. For students take their cue from you, the leader of the classroom. And just as a tidy, clutter-free environment conveys a message of respect and politeness and attention to detail, a messy room signals to all who enter that mediocrity is okay.

Indeed, you may say all the right things. You may even harp on the importance of neatness and mindfulness every day. But unless you're a living, breathing example and role model of organization, your words will ring hollow.

You must walk the walk.

Your room environment must reflect your high standards. It must reflect your vision of a well-behaved, hard-working classroom. It must reflect your desire to create a safe haven from the chaotic world outside.

So how do you get there? Where do you begin? Now do you make your classroom ambiance sing this most important refrain?

The good news is that, for teachers, summer is the season for new beginnings. It's the time for learning and making changes to your approach and preparing to come back in the fall stronger and more effective than ever.

You'll want to set aside half a day or so to roll up your sleeves and begin a wholesale makeover of your classroom. But just diving in with an undefined goal of getting it in "shipshape" can be a frustrating experience. What should you throw out? How do you prioritize what to keep? Where should you put everything?

To answer these questions for yourself and know how to proceed in a manner that is right for you and your students, you must focus on one overriding thought, or key, to classroom organization.

It's a thought that, when kept in the forefront, will provide direction and purpose. It's a thought that will govern your organizational path and virtually guarantee that your room sends the message you desire.

So what is this thought, this key to organization? It is *efficiency*. With efficiency as your guide, you're sure to organize your classroom in a manner that supports and inspires exceptional classroom management. Therefore, as you're pulling supplies and materials out of cabinets and placing them on the floor, as you're arranging your professional resources, as you're choosing what to keep and what to throw out, you should be continually asking yourself, "*What do I really need?*"

In other words, what is easiest, quickest, best, smoothest, most reliable, most effective, most important, and most realistically doable? If it doesn't match one or more of these criteria, if you don't really need it to deliver your curriculum, then get rid of it.

The truth is, you need far less "stuff" than you think you do. Good teaching has little to do with the accumulation of materials. Good teaching is about relationships and preparation and inspiration.

You use your materials, supplies, and guides to *support* your teaching. They don't use you.

### **A Simple Change, But a Big Difference**

Clearing the clutter out of your classroom and paring your materials down to what you really need will feel . . . awesome.

You'll gain a greater sense of freedom, control, and confidence. You'll know where everything is and how to access it quickly. You'll think clearer and breathe easier. You'll feel like you can handle anything.

But the real power of organizing your classroom with efficiency as your guide is the impact it will have on your students.

Requiring nothing more than a few satisfying hours of elbow grease, your new-look classroom will say more to your students—as well as parents, administrators, and anyone else who enters—about your sky-high expectations than your words ever will.

