

STRATEGIES TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR FIRST YEAR



# NEW 2021 2022 TEACHER GUIDE

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## My Association Contacts

Local President \_\_\_\_\_

President's Contact Information \_\_\_\_\_

Local Building Representative \_\_\_\_\_

Building Representative's Contact Information \_\_\_\_\_

CEA UniServ Rep \_\_\_\_\_

UniServ Rep's Contact Information \_\_\_\_\_

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The Connecticut Education Association welcomes you to the teaching profession! As a member, you belong to the largest teachers union in the state. We hope this handbook helps you get your career off to a great start. More resources for new teachers are available at [cea.org](http://cea.org). Our national affiliate, the National Education Association, also offers resources at [nea.org](http://nea.org).

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# YOUR UNION

## Connecticut Education Association Works with You

The Connecticut Education Association (CEA) is your statewide teachers union. We represent pre-k–12 public school teachers, university students preparing for teaching careers, and retired teachers. Together, CEA members, leaders, and staff provide a united voice for quality public education. CEA is affiliated with the National Education Association (NEA), which represents three million teachers and is the nation's largest teachers union.

CEA is headquartered in Hartford and has regional offices in Norwalk, Norwich, Trumbull, Waterbury, and Windsor. Other organizations within the Connecticut Education Association include CEA-Retired, (serving retired teachers) and the CEA Aspiring Educators Program, whose six Connecticut chapters provide practical experiences to over 300 future teachers.

Your Connecticut Education Association advocates on behalf of students and teachers at the state legislature, the State Department of Education, and at school board meetings, as well as in the principal's office and in the community to ensure that teachers have the resources and time to teach, and students have the tools and time to learn.

## Quality Public Education for All

Our members across the state—and three million nationwide, through the National Education Association (NEA)—advocate for a quality public education for all students in a fully resourced school with caring and trained public school employees.

## Teachers' Working Conditions Are Students' Learning Conditions

Your CEA advocates for smaller class sizes, less standardized testing, greater input into curriculum, better salaries and benefits, safe buildings, and more. Better working conditions mean a better learning environment for your students.

As CEA members, we stand up to injustice to ensure children have an opportunity to learn and teachers have an opportunity to earn a living wage, retirement security, and fair and collaborative working conditions.

## CEA Community Commitment

CEA teachers are active in their communities. We work with parent and community groups to pass school budgets. CEA members promote causes that are important to us, such as Read Across America Day. We also support the Connecticut Education Foundation (CEF) through charitable contributions. CEF provides help for disadvantaged children and scholarships for students pursuing teaching careers.



# MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

CEA provides essential benefits that can be quantified—benefits that enhance your financial security. Some of the benefits CEA members receive include:

- Advocacy at the local, state, and national levels regarding policies that affect you and your classroom
- Expert representation in bargaining for your salary, health insurance, and working conditions
- Representation when you need it most—when your rights are threatened or violated. Each year, some good teachers are mistreated or falsely accused of wrongdoing. CEA is on your side with free legal representation that would otherwise cost thousands of dollars
- Legal representation in workers' compensation actions and Department of Children and Families (DCF) complaints, which can also save thousands in legal fees
- Expert advice, support, and professional development from CEA staff and trainers
- Award-winning CEA member publications that support your career
- Opportunities for local, regional, and statewide leadership experience

CEA has established partnerships with vendors, retailers, and the National Education Association to provide you with savings on a wide variety of goods and services:

- You can save thousands of dollars when you buy a new car through the NEA Auto Buying

## IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS...

- ➔ About your rights and benefits generally: your local building representative or local president is your first contact.
- ➔ About specific CEA or NEA Member Benefits: visit [cea.org/discounts](http://cea.org/discounts) or call 860-525-5641 or 1-800-842-4316.
- ➔ About how you can be considered for participation in state or local CEA committees: contact your local president.

Program or through CEA's partnership with Buyer's Edge.

- Get significant CEA discounts on travel, fitness, theater tickets, museum admission, adventure parks, skiing, rental cars, clothing, groceries, bookstores, auto service and tires, home mortgages, loans, and the NEA credit card. New discounts and member savings are constantly being added.
- \$1 million in liability insurance for on-the-job protection
- Life and property insurance



# THE FIRST WEEKS

## Establishing Positive Relationships with Colleagues

Your relationships with other educators and administrators are important to your success the first year and beyond.

- **Introduce yourself to colleagues.** Fellow educators and support staff can help you greatly. Get acquainted with other teachers and ask your local Association representatives for help in meeting your colleagues.
- **Ask veteran teachers for their advice.** Be willing to admit you have a lot to learn from experienced teachers.
- **Find a mentor.** If you are not assigned a mentor, or your assigned mentor is not a good match, ask your local Association president or building representative to help you find a new one.
- **Be a team player.** Make sure you share your questions and ideas with your colleagues. You are not in this alone—you can help others, and they can help you.
- **Minimize commitments for non-instructional duties, especially as you begin your teaching career.** It is better to appreciate fully the time your teaching responsibilities will consume before you commit to other activities and responsibilities.
- **Communicate with your principal.** Take the initiative to schedule a time when you can meet with your principal and invite her or him to visit your classroom and give you constructive feedback (outside of the formal evaluation process). Listen carefully and respond to suggestions in a professional manner.
- **Get acquainted with your CEA affiliate (aka local Association).** Learn whom to contact regarding your contract and your rights on the job—usually it is your building representative or local president. Attend your union meetings to help build a professional support system.
- **Say thank you** to those who help and support you, including other teachers and administrators.

## Building a Team with Paraprofessionals/ Instructional Aides

Paraprofessionals are part of the instructional team. A good working relationship between teacher and para will benefit not only the two of you but your students as well.

- **Be respectful.** The paraprofessional should be a valued member of the classroom team. If he or she is not performing the job correctly, be upfront about it and discuss it directly and diplomatically. Be professional.
- **Get to know each other.** Schedule time when you can talk about your backgrounds, goals, and approaches to different situations in the classroom.
- **Clarify expectations.** Tell the para what you want to achieve with your class. Have a clear and open conversation about the tasks you will do and the tasks that will be done by the para. Provide guidance, but give the para some flexibility. Ask colleagues how they utilize their paraprofessionals if you are unsure of their responsibilities.
- **Communicate.** Touch base with the para every day if possible, but at least once a week, particularly when it comes to goals for students. Listen to his or her insights and be open to suggestions.
- **Share materials with the para.** Share copies of lesson plans and any professional development materials you receive. This will help your para understand the mission and strategies being implemented in the classroom.
- **Seek feedback regularly.** Ask the para if you are meeting frequently enough and providing clear guidance. Ask if your job roles are clearly defined. Does the para feel overburdened or underutilized? What areas need improvement?
- **Compliment.** If the para is doing a good job, let him or her know you appreciate it.

# CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

## Creating a Positive Classroom Environment

One of the most important things a new teacher must learn is how to manage the classroom.

An effective teacher is someone who can motivate students. The day-to-day reality, however, is that students often create minor annoyances, squabbles, and issues that can pull you and other students off task. How do you control your classroom and maintain a positive learning environment?

Experts agree that having a classroom management system is the key. Try these tips from your colleagues:

- **Set and outline your expectations at the beginning of the year.** Within the first week, establish class rules and consequences with your students if possible. The rules should emphasize mutual respect and consideration for everyone in the classroom—students, teachers, and paras. If these rules are clear, especially if they are the result of consensus, students are more likely to respect and follow them. It is a good idea to post the rules.
- **Create a supportive classroom.** Be approachable. Let students get to know you by sharing something appropriate about yourself, your family, and your pets. Notice and acknowledge students; let them know that you care about them, respect them, and think they can succeed. Reach out to their families or guardians as appropriate so that you establish a relationship.
- **Meet with your mentor.** Mentors can provide important advice for classroom management. Make the time you meet with your mentor a priority.
- **Be aware.** Good teachers know what is going on in the classroom at all times, so they can anticipate trouble and head it off—a quality sometimes referred to as “eyes in the back of your head” or “with-it-ness.” Arrange your classroom to make this possible.
- **Structure the time in your class.** Students benefit from a predictable schedule—it provides comfort. Start each class with an attention-grabber such as a word of the day, trivia question, or math problem—whatever enhances your curriculum.
- **Assess your lessons to ensure maximum student engagement.** The most important behavior intervention may be an academic one. Arrange lessons so that they are

engrossing and students can participate and succeed in the skills you are teaching. Too much “sit-and-get” time frustrates students of all ages. Through engagement you may eliminate many frustrations that lead to disruptive behavior.

- **Teach study skills along with subject matter.** Many students do not know how to study, develop an outline, or use multimedia resources, and their frustration can boil over into behavior problems. For example, you might review graph-reading techniques and charting procedures in math, or technology applications that can help them succeed in other subjects.
- **Give students specific ways to ask you for help.** Some students are not comfortable asking you for help in front of the entire class. Others do not know any alternatives to yelling or interrupting. Arrange for students to give you a signal when they need help, such as putting a book on the corner of their desk, let them know they can meet with you briefly after class, or match them with peer role models.

Would you or your colleagues benefit from classroom management training? If so, contact your local president and ask to have CEA Educational Issues Specialist Michele Ridolfi O’Neill deliver the “I Can Do It” Classroom Management program in your school or district.

- **Give students tasks or jobs to keep them engaged.** This also helps promote a sense of community and responsibility to the class and their peers.
- **Be the one in charge.** Students benefit most when you are the clear adult, not a buddy. Let the students know it is their responsibility to control their behavior.
- **Do not be afraid to change something that is not working.** Sometimes lesson plans need to be adjusted or classroom management techniques tweaked to better meet the needs of your students. Be open to making changes for improved success in learning.
- **Review your content area and curriculum on an ongoing basis.** The better you know your subject and pedagogy, the better your



students will respond to your teaching. If you do not know the answer to a question, say so and try to find the answer, if it is relevant to the class.

- **Dress for success.** When you present a professional appearance, you will get more respect from students, parents, administrators, and colleagues.
- **Figure out the “why” behind the behavior before you correct it.** Knowing WHY a student is off task or creating a disruption can help you better determine how to deal with it. Ask the student directly and privately, consult the school counselor, psychologist, or social worker, and talk to trusted and knowledgeable colleagues to determine interventions.

### What to Do When Problems Arise

Despite your best efforts to prevent them, discipline problems can occur. You will have to gauge the appropriate response for your class, depending on the situation, the problem, and your students’ ages and abilities.

Here are some tips:

- **Know school policy.** Get a copy of your school’s discipline policy and read it thoroughly. Find out if there is a teacher support committee for help with discipline cases.
- **Provide a warning.** If the situation starts getting out of hand, clearly explain to the students involved the consequences of their actions. Then follow through. For serious incidents or incidents that resulted in significant discipline, record what happened, who was involved, what you did, and who witnessed the incident—ideally on the day the incident occurred—in written notes to yourself. Be sure to indicate the date on your notes.
- **Let the student know that the discipline resulted from the behavior, not the student**—it is not personal. Speak with the student before he or she leaves your room to dispel hard feelings and review the reason for the discipline. If policy dictates, inform your

principal afterwards.

- **Remind students of your classroom rules.** Review them periodically, especially after classroom management issues arise or when returning from school vacations.
- **Be fair.** Be consistent in your discipline methods. Apologize if you make a mistake or accuse someone unjustly. Listen to the student’s side of the story.
- **Do not use sarcasm or ridicule.** Be aware of how students may perceive your comments. Something you intended as a joke may be viewed as unfairly critical. Do not point out a student’s mistakes in front of the entire class.
- **Watch for bullying and intimidation and address those problems immediately.** Let students know they can tell an adult when they feel unsafe, and make it clear that bullying and put-downs will not be tolerated in your class.

### If a conflict is serious, potentially violent, or ongoing, remember:

- **Call for help.** When a conflict is serious or violent, seek appropriate help and intervention immediately for your own protection and that of your students.
- **Never use force.** It is never acceptable to hit or strike a student. Never touch a student when disciplining him or her. Defer to a school administrator to remove the student.
- **Consult with the special education teacher to address disruptive behavior from a student with special needs.** Ask to be a member of the team that develops the student’s individual education plan so that the team can determine appropriate methods of discipline. Ask the parents how they deal with disruptive behavior.
- **Explore conflict mediation.** Many schools are implementing such programs. The idea is to get the parties to talk face to face, identify the problem, and outline acceptable solutions.
- **Take precautions to avoid situations where your behavior could be misinterpreted.** Use team teaching, teaching assistants, and volunteers to assist when possible. Invite parents to observe classes. Keep classroom doors open. Exercise caution and common sense.
- **Know your district’s policy for reporting incidents.**
- **When in doubt about what to do,** ask your mentor, a colleague, or your CEA building representative.

CEA offers a variety of workshops to assist members in dealing with difficult student behaviors, addressing student trauma, and fostering social emotional learning. Visit [cea.org/pla](http://cea.org/pla) for a list of offerings, and contact your local Association president to inquire about scheduling one in your district.

## Know Your Rights: How to Respond to Aggressive Student Behavior

Aggressive student behavior toward teachers has been called a silent crisis, and aggressive students are increasingly the youngest children in our schools. Because many teachers are unsure of their rights, administrators are often unwilling to address or report the problem. Remember that regardless of the child's age, unwanted physical contact (such as biting, spitting, or kicking) is unacceptable and must be reported. This allows you and the student to get the necessary help. So, what do you do about a student's aggressive behavior toward you or other students?

- **Document unusual or escalating behavior in writing.**
- **Review your school's safety plan, board of education policies and your collective bargaining agreement for protections.**
- **File a report with your principal.** If appropriate, at the top of the report, write "Pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-233g(a)." This refers to a Connecticut notification law that requires your principal to forward a copy of the report to the local police. Note: This does not constitute a criminal report; it is a civil reporting statute.
- **Provide your local Association with a copy of your report with students' names redacted so the local can follow up with the administration.**
- **If you have an injury, see the school nurse or seek outside medical attention.** Consider filing a workers' compensation notice of injury so that the incident is documented in the event you do need to make a claim down the road.
- **You are entitled to file a criminal report of threats or physical violence with the police;** state statute prohibits school administrators from interfering or prohibiting such reporting.
- **If the student who engaged in the aggressive behavior has an IEP, request a PPT meeting in writing immediately** and include a copy of your report. Additional supports and modifications or a change in the student's placement might be in order. If the child did not have an IEP, a referral for a special education evaluation may be appropriate if his/her behavior is impeding his/her ability to learn.



## Resources for New Teachers

### **Teachers.net**

**teachers.net**

Classroom activities, lesson plans, tips for classroom management, free classroom posters, and school clip art

### **Better Lesson**

**betterlesson.com**

Innovative lessons from effective teachers

### **PBS Learning Media**

**cptv.pbslearningmedia.org**

Classroom resources for K-12

### **Works4ME**

**nea.org/works4me**

Strategies to keep students on task and ideas to stay organized

### **Tools and Ideas**

**nea.org/home/ToolsAndIdeas.html**

Resources from the National Education Association

### **Share My Lesson**

**sharemylesson.com**

K-12 resources and the largest online community of educators in the world

### **The Teaching Channel**

**teachingchannel.org**

Lesson plans, tips, strategies, and teacher videos

### **Teach Net**

**teachnet.org**

Lessons plans, how-to articles, information about grants, and videos

### ***The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher***

Harry K. Wong and Rosemary T. Wong. Harry K. Wong Publications, 2009.

### ***Why Didn't I Learn This in College?***

Second Edition. Paula Rutherford. Just ASK Publications, 2009.

This book, which is in no way meant to demean teacher prep programs, helps provide practical management and instruction tips.

### ***The Restorative Practices Handbook for Teachers, Disciplinarians and Administrators***

Bob Costello, Joshua Wachtel, and Ted Wachtel, 2009.

# TECHNOLOGY

## Use School Technology Wisely

Technology can transform and enhance classroom instruction and help you further your own professional development. However, it can also create pitfalls for educators. Misuse of technology is one of the most common causes for discipline.

Keep these tips in mind:

- **Use school-issued devices only for school-related work.**
- **Read and understand your district's acceptable use policy (AUP) for Internet, social media, and email use.** The policies should define where, when, and how long school employees may use school-issued devices and network services, and restrictions on social media posts should be made clear. Do not use school devices for anything not permitted in the policy. Under the AUP, you are also likely to be responsible for exercising reasonable supervision over student use.
- **Remember, the district has the right to restrict or prohibit access** at any time for any reason. Activities typically prohibited include harassment, discrimination, viewing or transmitting inappropriate language or images, and copyright infringement.

Would you or your colleagues benefit from social media safety training? If so, ask your local president to contact CEA and schedule a session in your school or district.

- **Do not expect your email to be private.** The school district owns and controls the email system. Even deleted emails can be retrieved and used against you. Members of the public may be able to gain access to your emails, so do not make statements or send materials that are not related to your professional duties and that are not respectful. Do not send any personal, confidential, or private emails from your district email address, district-issued devices, or over district networks.
- **Do not access, receive, or transmit anything that could be interpreted as obscene or pornographic.** It is good practice to notify the technology coordinator if you receive an unsolicited, inappropriate email and delete

it right away. Never let students see anything even marginally inappropriate.

- **Grades, IEPs, and all other private data must be secured.** Just as you wouldn't leave your grade books sitting on your desk, don't leave your electronic data and confidential communications unprotected.
- **Do not use school computers or other district-issued devices for commercial purposes,** such as promoting a summer business or selling items on Craigslist or eBay.

## Be careful what you post on social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube

If you post on social media, remember that your photos, videos, and comments could jeopardize your job if administrators, parents, or board of education members consider them offensive or unprofessional. Avoid posting anything negative about your school, students, students' parents, or the district. Also avoid posting photos or video of yourself with alcohol or engaging in conduct that would be embarrassing if disclosed at a board of education meeting. In general, don't post anything you would not want viewed by your students, colleagues, administrators, or the local newspaper.

- **Consider deleting or not starting social media accounts.** The safest way to protect your privacy is not to have accounts on Facebook, etc. For many, however, social media is an important way to be in touch with family and friends. If you have social media accounts, consider modifying your user name on social media. Many teachers use their first and middle names, or reverse their names, to make it more difficult for students to find their accounts. This helps but does not guarantee that your posts will be private. You should still follow all of the precautions listed above about what you post.
- **Frequently review your privacy settings on social media sites.** Make sure you know who can see what you post online. Restrict private social media accounts so that only your close friends and family members can see what you post—but always keep in mind that anything you post can be forwarded and shared beyond that circle. Make sure your Facebook privacy settings are set so that you have to approve any time someone wants to tag you in a photo.

- Do not friend or follow students or parents on social media sites.
- Create separate accounts if you are using social media for educational purposes or classroom lessons. Do not direct students or parents to your personal social media feeds for school updates. Keep your personal and professional lives separate.
- Do not post on personal social networking accounts during work hours or using district-issued devices or district networks. Posts made from a personal device using a school's Wi-Fi connection can be traced, and most posts show the time you posted.
- Review old social media posts you may have made before becoming a teacher. Delete any old posts that would be inappropriate if viewed by administrators, board of education members, students, or parents.
- Be aware that students sometimes target teachers via social networking sites. Contact your local president or Connecticut Education Association UniServ Representative for assistance if you are the subject of a fake social media profile or other inappropriate activity.



# DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

## Bringing Balance to Your Classroom

Our students live and will work in an increasingly diverse society. Ethnic diversity in student populations is increasing. Immigration is bringing new languages and cultures, family structures are changing, and men and women continue to take on new roles in society.

The challenge for educators is to meet students' diverse educational needs while preparing all students to understand and appreciate differences in culture, learning style, interests, and values.

Here are some suggestions:

- **Look beyond group stereotypes and treat students as individuals.** It is important to assess the needs of students individually so that each can develop his or her potential.
- **Recognize and understand cultural differences.** Be aware of such cultural elements as clothing, time, space, gestures, ethics, values, religion, holidays, gender roles, sexual orientation, rights, and duties. Make an effort to learn more about your students' cultures by reading, researching, speaking with colleagues, and talking to people from the groups represented in your classroom.
- **Make sure your expectations are the same for all students.** Challenge all your students, and make sure you interact equally with boys and girls.
- **Adapt your teaching style.** Students bring different experiences and learning styles to your classroom, so use a variety of approaches to be sure everyone is successful.
- **Celebrate diversity in your everyday teaching.** Students' multicultural perspectives are assets that can be used to help all students develop literary and critical thinking skills. Make connections through instructional themes relevant to many cultures.
- **Watch for signs of bullying in your classroom, hallways, and playgrounds.** Physical or emotional bullying often targets cultural differences, sexual orientation, or gender expression. Do not tolerate these behaviors. Enlist the help of your school counselor or psychologist if you need tips for addressing and preventing bullying.

- **Know your district's harassment policies.** Every district is required to have policies on racial and sexual harassment.

## All Students Can Thrive

**First Day of School Scenario:** You discover that your class is made up of students with a variety of abilities—physical, developmental, and cognitive. How do you make sure they are all accepted by their peers and progressing satisfactorily?

**Would you or your colleagues benefit from a presentation on special education law and regulations? If so, ask your local president to contact Robyn Kaplan-Cho, CEA's Retirement and Special Education Issues Specialist, to schedule a workshop in your school or district.**

When special education teachers or educational support professionals join your classroom, how do you work with your students and the other adults?

Those are some of the challenges of an inclusive classroom. Here are some suggestions for working successfully with students of all abilities:

- **Avoid labeling.** When you refer to your students, make sure they are all your kids and not “the special ed kids,” “the English learners,” “the gifted kids,” and so on.
- **Be supportive and flexible.** You will need to adapt some of your assignments and strategies so that students of all abilities can achieve success.
- **Be an active member of the special education support team.** Together you can discuss concerns and develop strategies for working with students who have special needs. As a member of a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team, you will have a say in the goals of the plan, which should reflect your goals for the general education classroom. If a student comes into your class with an established IEP, work closely with all the service providers and the

- parents to determine their top priorities.
- **Enable all students to participate.** Look for ways all students can share interests and ideas. Participating in an activity, classroom duty, or discussion boosts self-esteem and confidence.
  - **Explore teaching options.** After you get your feet wet in the classroom, consider co-teaching, collaborative partnerships, or concurrent small group instruction with other staff, including special education teachers and teachers of English learners (EL students).
  - **Seek help from other teachers.** Reach out to a local Association colleague. Find someone with more experience and see how that teacher handles specific situations. Look for ways you can support each other. If problems arise, be proactive and discuss them with the other staff, the building principal, or the student support team. Create a collaborative planning team to address classroom issues on a regular basis and also celebrate your own learning.

## Check out these resources

### Connecticut Department of Education Bureau of Special Education

[portal.ct.gov/SDE/Special-Education/Bureau-of-Special-Education](http://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Special-Education/Bureau-of-Special-Education)

### Connecticut Department of Education Bureau of Special Education Learning Disabilities and Dyslexia Resources

[portal.ct.gov/SDE/Special-Education/Specific-Learning-Disability-and-SLD---Dyslexia](http://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Special-Education/Specific-Learning-Disability-and-SLD---Dyslexia)

### National Education Association Special Education and IDEA Resources

[nea.org/specialed](http://nea.org/specialed)

### National Association for Gifted Children

[nagc.org](http://nagc.org)

### Council for Exceptional Children

[cec.sped.org](http://cec.sped.org)

### Education World

[educationworld.com/special\\_ed](http://educationworld.com/special_ed)

### CEA Special Education Resources

[cea.org/special-education](http://cea.org/special-education)

# PARENT INVOLVEMENT

## Parents Can Be Your Best Allies

When parents or guardians become involved in school, children do better, teacher morale improves, parents rate the school higher, and the entire educational process benefits.

Start the process by finding ways to open the lines of communication with parents. Here are some guidelines for communicating with parents and involving them in their children's education.

- **Take the initiative.** Contact parents through phone calls, email, and personal notes. Provide information at the beginning of the year on what is covered in the class and what is expected from each student.
- **Be sure to share positive feedback about students.** One idea that works well is to note when students do something good or perform well in class, and then communicate with parents. Keep in mind that some parents might not have Internet access or email.
- **Consider a variety of communication tools.** Ask parents to complete a short questionnaire on their children's likes and interests. Create a classroom website or newsletter (consult your school's guidelines for such a communication tool—if there is no specific policy, tell your principal about your idea and get his or her approval). Have students log their assignments and activities briefly in a notebook and take the notebook home each day.
- **Encourage parents to attend school events.** Add a “parent interest” section to your class newsletter about school events—including and beyond the teacher-parent conferences—providing parents with opportunities to learn more about their child's school.
- **Give parents a hands-on role in their child's school success.** Ask them to sign off on homework, read to young children, encourage quiet study time, and minimize technology distractions.
- **Remember, not every child has a parent at home.** Special challenges also exist for students who have parents working two or three jobs, or who face other challenges, such as homelessness. These parents may interact less with you and your school but need you as an ally even more.

## Creating Meaningful Parent Relationships

It pays to establish positive relationships early and maintain good communication throughout the year.

- **If possible, contact parents to introduce yourself before the school year begins.** Make positive contact during the first few weeks of school via a phone call, note, or newsletter. Use back-to-school night to establish rapport with parents.
- **Provide parents with a copy of the rules of your classroom (see Classroom Management, p. 4).** Parents will appreciate knowing that you have rules and expectations

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## Parent/Teacher Conference Tips That Work

Your only contact with some of your students' families might be during parent-teacher conferences. Make your meetings productive and successful.

- ➔ **Schedule wisely.** Provide times when working parents can attend. Allow enough time for conferences, and stay on schedule. If you are scheduling back-to-back conferences, give yourself a short breather between each.
- ➔ **Get organized.** Be ready with your grade book, test scores, student work samples, attendance records, and a flexible agenda. Talk about student progress, strengths, and goals and answer parents' questions about their child's abilities and achievements.
- ➔ **Open with a positive statement** about the student's abilities, schoolwork, or interests and save at least one encouraging comment for the end.
- ➔ **Stress collaboration.** Let parent(s) or family member(s) know you want to work together in the best interests of their child. Hear parents out, especially if they are upset or negative, but do not be afraid to ask to end a conference and continue another day if a parent is too upset to rationally discuss the issue.
- ➔ **Be specific.** Give examples and practical suggestions rather than generalities. End with a summary of the meeting and outline actions both you and the parents will take.
- ➔ **Bridge communication gaps.** Find out in advance if you need an interpreter for parents who are deaf, hard of hearing, or do not speak English well.
- ➔ **Always seek to improve.** CEA offers professional workshops to assist members with parent conferences and difficult discussions. Contact your local Association president to schedule a training.



## TEAM UP WITH PARENTS

### Encourage parents to:

- Make completion of homework a family expectation.
- Show interest in their child's classes by asking specific questions.
- Use question-and-answer sessions to help the student prepare for tests.

and will be more likely to help you by reinforcing those rules.

- **If it becomes necessary to deliver bad news**—either significant academic or disciplinary news—try to meet or talk by phone with parents. Try to make sure parents hear the news from you first, even if it is in the company of a trusted colleague (provided this does not violate FERPA). Follow up with an email documenting the conversation.
- **Never respond right away when you are upset by an angry email.** Calm down first, then call the parent instead of writing if you can. Always document calls to students' homes, including those when you did not reach the parent.

- **When you meet with angry parents, begin by listening to them.** Sometimes, despite your best efforts, you may be confronted by angry parents. It is usually not about you—or not only about you. Let them express their feelings, note the issues that are being aired, and ask questions that show you are listening and understand their point of view. Once they have calmed down, you can begin to give them missing information and redirect the conversation to how you and they will work as a team to ensure their child is successful.
- **Seek advice and support from your principal or experienced colleagues.**
- **Do not get put on the defensive.** If parents are unwilling to listen to you, ask respectfully if they will meet with you and your principal to discuss the situation.
- **Remain professional at all times.** Choose your words carefully. Never argue, yell, or use sarcasm.
- **Try to keep the focus on the future**—what you and the parents will do to make sure the problem will not reoccur.
- **Set a date for a follow-up meeting** or conversation to go over the plan and determine whether any changes are needed.
- **Document both positive and negative contacts with parents,** and keep the records in a file or email file folder for future reference.
- **If your supervisor asks you to meet with parents to apologize for your conduct,** contact your local building representative or local president before you agree to do so.



# TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL TEACHER EVALUATION

Scoring proficient or higher on your summative evaluation involves knowing your rights and responsibilities, as well as how to prepare for observations and conferences with your evaluator. Be sure to consult the *CEA Guide to Teacher Evaluation* ([cea.org/new-teacher-resources](https://cea.org/new-teacher-resources))—an essential and detailed primer on teacher evaluation with important tips on the process and securing a positive outcome—available to members on CEA’s website. Below are a few simple steps to a successful summative rating.

**Please note:** The Connecticut Department of Education (CSDE) is offering districts the option of adopting a set of flexibilities intended to lessen stress and enhance the wellbeing of students and educators due to the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning. Be sure to ask your local president or contact CEA to find out if your district intends to adopt these flexibilities or keep its existing evaluation plan. If your district adopts the flexibilities, this could lessen some of the requirements described below. Go to [cea.org/coronavirus-resources](https://cea.org/coronavirus-resources) to find the latest resources, guidance for teachers, webinars, and more from Connecticut officials, public health, the Centers for Disease Control, and CEA.

- **Be familiar with your district’s teacher evaluation plan.** Every district has an educator evaluation plan that must be aligned with state guidelines and statutory requirements. Virtually all plans use four ratings to score teachers, and they equally weight student growth and teacher practice in the classroom.
- **Know the timeline.** Review your district’s plan and all deadlines. Be sure to schedule your observations before the deadline.
- **Schedule a midyear conference as close to the midyear point as possible.** If it looks like you are not on track to meet a student learning goal, ask to adjust it at the midyear conference and be able to document the interventions you tried.
- **Know your rights and responsibilities as a first or second year teacher.** You are required to have three in-class observations, at least two of which must include a pre-conference; all must be followed by timely feedback and post-conferences. If the flexibilities are adopted by your district, the number of observations and conferences may be reduced.

Your student learning goal(s) and the indicators of academic growth (IAGDs) must

be mutually agreed upon by you and your evaluator. If the flexibilities are adopted, you may select either an academic or a social emotional learning goal (SEL) and your indicators or measures of accomplishment do not have to be mathematically quantifiable (no standardized indicator will be required under the flexibilities).

You may adjust your goals at the midyear conference if there is mutual agreement.

- **If you and your evaluator cannot come to mutual agreement about goals, indicators, ratings, or adjustments to goals, you can** grieve procedural violations of the teacher evaluation and support program. Be sure to speak to your local Association colleagues about the goal-setting process. You can grieve procedural violations of the teacher evaluation and support program, such as any step in the evaluation process that was not followed with fidelity. Save all correspondence with your evaluator to your personal email and save hard copies of your evaluation records at home.
- **Get to know your evaluator.** Get a sense of your evaluator’s values, standards, and expectations. Be proactive about setting up appointments, and be timely with your paperwork. Consider inviting your evaluator in for an observation when you have something creative and exciting to share. Ask your evaluator for advice and guidance and advocate respectfully for yourself when necessary.
- **This is essential: align your lesson plan to the observation rubric** and share a copy with your evaluator PRIOR to your observation. Some evaluators will ask for this, and others will not; provide it regardless—it is a roadmap for the evaluator to see that you are covering each element of the rubric. Add the domain and indicator in parentheses after each lesson activity. This will help the evaluator find evidence and tag it appropriately.
- **Ask for and be receptive to feedback.** Your colleagues are your best resource. If possible, invite your Teacher Evaluation and Mentoring (TEAM) mentor or a trusted colleague into your class to get some

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If you have a problem related to evaluation, contact your local president or UniServ Representative.

formative feedback on what you are doing well and what needs improvement before your evaluator observes you.

- **Observe colleagues and borrow strategies and routines that might work well in your classroom.** Do not hesitate to ask for help when you need it. New teachers deserve help and support!
- **Know your students.** To determine student needs, gather data from a variety of sources, not just test scores. Set a baseline against which future growth can be measured. Document factors that are beyond your ability to control—such as chronic absenteeism—that will impact student performance. Collect a representative sample of student work demonstrating progress over time that you can share with your evaluator. Select learning targets that are rigorous but realistic and attainable for your students. Remember, mutual agreement on learning goals and indicators is required.
- **Reach out to your PDEC members.** Every school district must have a

Professional Development and Evaluation Committee (PDEC) that includes teacher representative(s) of your collective bargaining unit. District PDECs are charged with annually revising their evaluation plan and drafting the professional development plan. Be sure to know who these teacher representatives are. If there are aspects of the evaluation process that are overly burdensome or are not being followed, be sure to let your PDEC representatives know.

- **Do not panic.** The evaluation process need not be intimidating; it can be valuable and informative when you are prepared. In addition to knowing the process, take care of yourself. Eat lunch with your colleagues whenever you can. Get plenty of sleep, especially the night before an observation. Know every aspect of your lesson plan. Be confident in your abilities.
- **Again, see the CEA Guide to Teacher Evaluation ([cea.org/new-teacher-resources](http://cea.org/new-teacher-resources))** for a more comprehensive compendium of tips and essential information.



# SCHOOL SAFETY

## Help Provide a Safe Learning Environment

Statistically, public schools are one of the safest places for children, but it is still essential to be prepared for the possibility of violence or other life-threatening emergencies. Where do you start?

- Familiarize yourself with your district's crisis management plan. Connecticut law requires all school districts to develop such a plan in cooperation with staff, parents, law enforcement, and others.
- Make sure you receive training in crisis procedures, including opportunities to practice the procedures with students present. Contact your site leader or local president if your district does not offer this.
- Know your school building. Make sure you get a map and a complete tour of your school. Know where designated safe areas are and how to get there. Familiarize yourself with evacuation routes and alternate routes if the main route is blocked.
- Know the staff and other adults authorized to be in your school. If you see someone you do not recognize, follow your school's policy for reporting an unauthorized visitor.
- Pay attention to warning signs that a student could become violent. These include preoccupation with weapons and death, cruelty to animals, expressions of anger or violence in writings or drawings, and isolation. Your school should have either a committee or an individual (sometimes the principal) you can contact regarding concerns about a potentially violent student. Ask others at your school how to access resources for troubled youth.
- Help foster a safe and respectful environment in your classroom and school. Know your school district's policies on bullying,

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## What should I do if a student is injured under my supervision?

Follow these steps:

1. Seek medical attention from the school nurse or administrator and call 911 immediately if the severity of the injury so warrants.
2. Within 24 hours, complete an accident report for the district.
3. Contact your local president, who will contact your CEA UniServ Representative ([cea.org/cea-staff/#uniserv](http://cea.org/cea-staff/#uniserv)). Do not discuss the incident with the media or anyone else until you have been counseled by your CEA UniServ Representative. This is for your protection and the protection of the student's privacy.
4. If you receive notice of a lawsuit or pending lawsuit, contact your CEA UniServ Representative, who will send you a claim form for your liability insurance provided through your CEA membership. The school district may also be a party to any lawsuit filed by parents. If the incident was a result of conduct within the course and scope of your employment, the district's attorney and/or representative of the school's insurance company will represent you in meetings on the matter. Contact your CEA UniServ Representative immediately if you receive notice that the district will not be representing you.

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intimidation, and hazing. Do not tolerate bullying, put-downs, harassment, or physical violence. Teach students how to resolve conflicts and manage anger, and help them practice these skills in everyday life. Work with others at your school to implement school-wide anti-bullying and school safety programs.

Check out NEA's Anti-Bullying Program:  
[neadjustice.org/social-justice-issues/bully-free/](http://neadjustice.org/social-justice-issues/bully-free/)



# STRESS MANAGEMENT

## Feeling Overwhelmed? You Are Not Alone—Hang in There!

The first year of teaching is a year of “firsts,” as you establish yourself personally, financially, and professionally. Learning to cope with the stress that accompanies these changes is critical to your success.

- **Find a friend who can be a trusted listener.** Talking a problem out will not necessarily make it go away, but it can relieve the tension.
- **Tame the paper tiger.** Keep up with paperwork, or it can ruin your love of teaching. Find a method that works for you, and try not to create more paperwork than you need to assess students, grade them fairly, and reflect and improve on your practice. If it helps to break student assignments into smaller chunks, do so, and only grade the portion that contains the skill(s) you’re assessing.
- **Schedule time for yourself.** A refreshing walk, good book, time with friends, or creative hobby will give you a chance to revitalize yourself and recharge your batteries.
- **Prioritize.** Do not feel you have to do



everything at once. Keep a to-do list. Review it daily and do one or two things. When you cross something off your list, you will have a sense of accomplishment.

- **Try not to procrastinate.** Having something hanging over you can cause more tension than the project is worth.
- **Try to leave your teaching at school.** If you find yourself taking home schoolwork, try to get it done early in the evening, or pick one weekend day to work on it, but leave at least one half of a weekend day to yourself for relaxation and fun.
- **Get plenty of sleep.** Go to bed early if you are tired. Do not lie awake worrying about how you should have handled a situation in class. Do not bring your computer or mobile device into your bedroom; blue light can affect sleeping patterns. Instead, read, write in a journal, practice gentle yoga, or drink some warm milk or decaffeinated tea before bed. Turn off email, text, or message notifications after a designated hour so that you aren’t disturbed.
- **Observe good health habits.** Exercise and watch your vitamin and mineral intake. Eat wholesome foods so that your body gets

Feeling overwhelmed and need some pointers about how to manage your time and responsibilities? Schedule a workshop on How to Maximize Your Time by asking your local president to contact CEA’s department of Policy, Research, and Government Relations.

enough calcium, potassium, iron, vitamin B, vitamin C, and protein. When under stress, the body calls on these nutrients for energy.

- **Whenever you’re upset about something during the day, think of three things that went well.** This helps to keep you focused on the positives.
- **Above all, be gentle with yourself.** You will have some bad days, and you make mistakes. Forgive yourself—you’re human!

# SPECIAL EDUCATION

## Important Responsibilities

If you teach special education, you have important responsibilities in addition to instructing your students. You are required by federal and state law, and often your local district, to document your work to ensure procedural safeguards for students with disabilities. This mandatory paperwork is an increasing part of special education teachers' workload.

No matter how good a teacher you are, there are legal consequences for failing to complete paperwork, and you risk losing your job if you fall too far behind. Get organized and take advantage of any support your school can provide. Be sure to ask for help if you have any questions!

- **Get a mentor and use his or her expertise.** If your school does not provide formal mentoring, find an experienced local Association colleague you can call on for advice. Also keep the lines of communication open with your fellow teachers.
- **Keep up with the required paperwork.** If you do find yourself falling behind, reach out immediately to trusted colleagues for advice and help. Do not wait until you are so far behind that you are in danger of losing your job. If there are special circumstances (a complicated case; numerous cases that have

required your attention all at once; other circumstances—personal or professional—that have required your time) go to your supervisor or principal or the special education coordinator or director and ask for time and support to get your work done.

- **Ask if clerical help is available.** Depending on the school district, you might be able to get help processing the paperwork. It is your responsibility, however, to get the work done.
- **When you attend IEP meetings, come prepared with a checklist** of things to address and accomplish—both general goals and items specific to that student. You also have the right to request supports to assist you in implementing the IEP using the Frequency and Duration of Supports Required for School Personnel to Implement this IEP on the Program Accommodations and Modifications page of the IEP. Examples of supports you can request include training, collaboration time with other staff, and paraprofessional support or a one-to-one aide. Preparation will make the IEP meetings productive and beneficial to you and your student.
- **Use systems to keep track of deadlines and students.** Most districts use an electronic data management system for special education. If yours does not, develop your own spreadsheets. Use one spreadsheet for due dates for IEPs, periodic reviews, and assessments; if you have case management responsibilities, use another spreadsheet to track students' whereabouts and progress. Color-coding the spreadsheet entries can be helpful.

CEA offers workshops on special education issues. For information, visit [cea.org/special-education](http://cea.org/special-education).

# SUBSTITUTES

## Help Your Substitute Succeed

If you have to miss a day of school, your class must still go on. Prepare ahead of time so that your substitute teacher knows what to do and where to find things. Keep essential information in a clearly marked substitute folder. Be aware of your school's norms or requirements for preparing for a substitute.

What your substitute needs to know:

- **Class schedule**, including regular classes, special classes (day and time), and an alternate plan in case special classes are canceled
- **Class roll**, including your seating chart for regular activities and special work groups, and students the substitute can call on for help if needed
- **Names and schedules of students** who leave the classroom for special reasons, such as to receive medication or for remedial or gifted programs
- **Opening activities**, absentee report, procedures for reporting lunch count, and other housekeeping tasks
- **Lesson plans** or where to find the plan book, including alternate plans in case the lesson depends on resources only you have
- **Classroom rules** and discipline procedures, including any district policies and notes about special cases
- **Location of all manuals** and materials to be used
- **Technical procedures for use of AV materials and equipment**
- **Names and schedules** of education support personnel and/or volunteers, and the name and location of a teacher to contact for assistance
- **Procedures for sick or injured students**, including location of nurse's office, district policy on dispensing medication, and notes on allergies or special needs
- **Procedures for regular and early dismissal.**
- **Building floor plan**, including emergency exits, drill routes, and procedures

Substitutes have the same goals for students as you do. Let your principal know when your substitute does a good job.

# YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AND RIGHTS

## Certification Protocols

### Make sure you renew your certificate in a timely manner.

If you hold a Connecticut teaching certificate, congratulations! It means you have already cleared your first professional hurdle by passing the necessary courses and tests. After your initial certification period, make sure you keep up with the expiration date for your certificate. This is your responsibility and not the responsibility of the school district in which you were hired. Even if you do not have the full amount of money necessary to renew your certificate before it expires, you should still send in the \$50 application fee and the required paperwork at least six weeks in advance of your certificate's expiration date in order to be sure that your certificate is renewed in a timely manner. Your employment depends on it.

- Connecticut has a three-tier certification continuum for fully certified teachers. The first step is receiving an Initial Educator Certificate; the second is receiving a Provisional Educator Certificate; and the final step is receiving a Professional Educator Certificate. Certificates are awarded upon the successful completion of requirements, which can include service in a school district. Please visit [portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Certification/guides/obtaining1109aw.pdf?la=en](http://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Certification/guides/obtaining1109aw.pdf?la=en) for information about certification requirements and the continuum.

**If you cannot find the answers to your questions by contacting the State Department of Education, or if you wish to verify information, please contact CEA Educational Issues Specialist Michele Ridolfi O'Neill at [micheleo@cea.org](mailto:micheleo@cea.org) or 860-725-6331.**

- The State keeps your certification records. Only the State Department of Education, which is the state agency responsible for granting and renewing teacher certificates, keeps a database of members' certificates. Your district will also keep a copy of your certificate on file once they have received it.
- Make sure the State Department of Education has your current email and mailing address. If you move or change your email, you should send them a notification for their files. The best way to make sure that the SDE has your

current contact information is to create a certification account by visiting [sdeportal.ct.gov/cecscreateuser](http://sdeportal.ct.gov/cecscreateuser). You can also update your information by emailing [teacher.cert@ct.gov](mailto:teacher.cert@ct.gov).

For questions about certification, visit [portal.ct.gov/SDE/Certification/Bureau-of-Certification/FAQ](http://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Certification/Bureau-of-Certification/FAQ).

To speak to an SDE certification officer, call 860-713-6969. The hotline is staffed Thursday and Friday from 12 to 4 p.m.

## Student Information and Privacy Rules

Most of the information you gather and retain regarding students is private—personal educational data protected by both state and federal privacy laws.

Sharing information when there is no valid educational reason for doing so may subject you to discipline by the district and to civil liability. It could also violate federal law (FERPA) and potentially put children at risk.

When discussing specific students with colleagues, ask yourself whether the discussion is really necessary to provide educational services to the student. If you are seeking advice about a student's academic challenges or behavioral issues, do so in a way that does not reveal the student's name or identity. Do not discuss individual students outside the school setting. Be sure volunteers in your classroom know they must keep students' information private.

Most importantly, in a world where data is so easily shared, be cautious in using or directing students to online services. Privacy specialists say that it takes only three pieces of "anonymous" data to identify a student. School district personnel are getting better at collecting, vetting, and listing approved online services and resources. Review your district's policies for using online services and apps.

Here are some tips:

- **Most student information is private and should not be released** to anyone but the student, his or her parents or legal guardians, or staff with a legitimate educational interest.
- **Privacy laws cover all forms of data.** If you cannot release something in written form, you cannot release it orally or digitally.
- **Make sure you are not unnecessarily sharing information about students—review your classroom practices.** Do not publicly list the names of top scorers or students who need to turn in work. Be cautious about



- students reviewing each other's work.
- **Be cautious using online resources and apps** by checking with your supervisor or other designated district employee when incorporating online services into your classroom instruction or administration.
- **Do not post students' work in a class newsletter or website** unless you have parental permission.
- **Taking photos or videos of students**—even working on projects or in your classroom individually or as a group—likely requires that parents sign a permission form. Check your school district policies or ask your principal.
- **Do not release information without being certain that it is not protected.** When there is any doubt, withhold the requested information until you check with your principal to determine whether it can be released.
- **If anyone questions you about a student,** whether it be the media, law enforcement, or a parent of another student, simply say that the information is private student data and you cannot discuss it (unless your supervisor allows it and to do so would not violate FERPA).

### Mandatory Reporting

Teachers are mandated reporters, as are other school personnel. Connecticut law defines your reasonable cause to suspect or believe that abuse or neglect has occurred to be based on observations, allegations, facts, or statements by a child, victim, or third party. The law does not require certainty or probable cause; you should report to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) anything you hear or see relative to abuse or neglect of a child.

If you know or have reason to believe one of your students has been the victim of child abuse or neglect, Connecticut law requires that you report it via DCF's Careline (1-800-842- 2288).

- **Do not rely on others to report.** The obligation to report lies with each mandated reporter.
- **For the child's protection—and yours—report any suspicion you have right away,** even if you are unsure. The law requires a report to be made within 12 hours of the time you have reason to believe there is abuse or neglect. The law also provides you with

immunity for reports made in good faith, and you can and should make the report anonymously.

- **Do not take it upon yourself to investigate whether abuse or neglect has occurred.** If you are unsure, you should always err on the side of reporting and leave the investigation to the proper authorities.

The statutory definitions of abuse and neglect can be found here: [portal.ct.gov/DCF/1-DCF/Child-Abuse-and-Neglect-Definitions](http://portal.ct.gov/DCF/1-DCF/Child-Abuse-and-Neglect-Definitions).

Some factors that may lead to a report of suspected abuse or neglect include but are not limited to:

- A child who has a pattern of unexplained injuries or an inordinate number of "explained" ones
- A child who regularly comes to school inappropriately dressed for the season
- A child who is habitually late or often absent from school
- A child who arrives early and leaves late because he or she is reluctant to go home
- A child who is unusually fearful of adults or other children
- A child who goes to the bathroom with difficulty or has trouble sitting
- A child who is constantly tired, thin, or shows evidence of malnutrition

### Appropriate Teacher-Student Relations

Touch is one of the most basic of human needs, but if you deliberately come into physical contact with your students—even in the most innocent of contexts—you put yourself and your career at risk.

Every year, many teachers are accused of inappropriately touching students. Even when

**Do you think your colleagues could benefit from becoming more familiar with Connecticut laws impacting teachers and students? Then schedule a workshop on Teachers and the Law by contacting your local president.**

the charges are unsubstantiated, the impact on a teacher's personal life, career, and colleagues can be devastating.

Be aware of, and sensitive to, physical and emotional boundaries. Remember, you are not your students' friend—you are their teacher. Let professional counselors and psychologists assist students with serious emotional issues. While you do not want to push away an elementary school student who impulsively gives you a hug, you do not want to initiate the touching. You

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**For more about mandated reporting, visit [portal.ct.gov/DCF/1-DCF/Reporting-Child-Abuse-and-Neglect](http://portal.ct.gov/DCF/1-DCF/Reporting-Child-Abuse-and-Neglect)**

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should notify an administrator or counselor if a child is regularly acting in a “needy” manner. As teachers, we need to be sensitive to our students’ social and emotional needs and respond with compassion, but we must also be cognizant of the issues that could arise.

Here are some other ways to reduce the risk of being accused:

- **Understand how your students may view you.** Elementary students often view teachers as parent figures. Middle school students may idealize you, and high school students may seek your advice on life choices, including their social lives. You may not be able to change how they view you, but you must draw a line as a professional and not engage with students in an inappropriate manner. When in doubt, ask yourself if either the student’s parents or your principal would disapprove.
- **Avoid physical horseplay with students.** Do not let students sit on your lap.
- **Do not meet with students alone in a closed or private space.** Specials teachers and coaches, along with counselors, are especially vulnerable. If you are giving a lesson with only one student, make sure you are within sight of the window. If your door does not have a window, leave the door open.
- **Do not engage in classroom banter that shows favoritism to one or more students.** The same is obviously true for banter that would embarrass or humiliate a student.
- **Avoid touching any student unless absolutely necessary.**
- **Never send notes, messages, emails, texts, or any other communication of a personal nature to students.** Parents should be copied on other correspondence that is exclusively educational. Be sure to follow district policy on social media and other electronic communications with students.
- **Use extreme caution when meeting with students in non-school settings,** especially when other adults are not present. You should

always have parent and district approval if you must meet off-site (for example, when tutoring a student).

- **Behave as the professional you are**—and as if you are being videotaped or audio-recorded. In this era of smartphones, you never know when you may be on “candid camera.”

### **Professional Records**

Keeping up-to-date personal and professional records in a safe, yet easily accessible location is as important as keeping your grade book and lesson plans organized.

Having appropriate documentation on hand can be critical to your placement on the salary schedule, resolution of misunderstandings, and a fair and accurate evaluation.

Keep the following documents and/or copies in one convenient spot:

- Teaching certificate
- Records of in-service education or advanced academic credit
- Performance evaluations and your responses or comments
- Letters of praise, directive, or reprimand
- Record of college attendance, dates, and degrees
- Transcripts of undergraduate and graduate degrees
- Record of accumulated sick leave and personal leave days
- Copies of teaching schedules for current and past years
- Records of incidents involving student discipline, violence, or other disruptive student behavior
- Copies of correspondence with administrators
- Copies of correspondence with parents and colleagues
- Copies of all documents in your personnel files. Personnel files are generally kept in your

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**Sec. 31-128b. Employee access to personnel files.** Each employer shall, within a reasonable time after receipt of a written request from an employee, permit such employee to inspect his personnel file if such a file exists. Such inspection shall take place during regular business hours at a location at or reasonably near the employee’s place of employment. Each employer who has personnel files shall be required to keep any personnel file pertaining to a particular employee for at least one year after the termination of such employee’s employment.

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district's superintendent's office. You should review your file annually to be sure you know what is in it. Keep copies of any disciplinary items.

### Educator Rights

It is not uncommon for good teachers to be falsely accused of wrongdoing. This can happen as a result of mistaken identity, an unhappy student or parent, or a miscommunication or misinterpretation.

You have the absolute right to union representation at a conference with an administrator if the meeting pertains to alleged misconduct or failure to meet your responsibilities. This is sometimes referred to as your Weingarten Rights (see below). Here are a few guidelines:

- **Request the purpose.** If an administrator invites you to a meeting without revealing why, request to know the purpose of the meeting. You have the right to have an Association representative present at a meeting called by administration if you think discipline might result from the meeting.
- **Seek help from a representative.** If you find out that the purpose of the conference is to investigate an event that may lead to disciplinary action, or to discuss proposed discipline, contact your building representative or local president for assistance! You have the right to schedule the conference at a time when a union representative can be present. We call this invoking your Weingarten Rights.

## RETIREMENT PRIMER FOR EARLY-CAREER EDUCATORS

Someday, you will consider retirement. In an effort to familiarize you with the basics of your retirement system, the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) has produced this guide ([cea.org/new-teacher-resources](http://cea.org/new-teacher-resources)). It focuses on issues of particular importance to both teachers just entering the state retirement system and others who may be years away from actually retiring. Through this publication and workshops that we offer, CEA hopes to make you more knowledgeable about the pension benefits to which you will be entitled, as well as the steps that you should take early in your career to maximize future opportunities. Proper planning will ensure that your road to retirement will be less complicated, less stressful, and more productive.

- **Stop any conference or meeting that turns into an investigation of alleged wrongdoing.** Virtually every day, good teachers are accused of wrongdoing. If you attend a conference that begins on a positive note but deteriorates into questions about wrongdoing and possible discipline, ask to stop the conference until you can obtain union advice

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## Accused of a Serious Work-Related Offense?

This is a worst-case scenario that will probably never happen to you, but better to be forewarned. If you are ever accused of a serious offense, contact your Connecticut Education Association UniServ Representative immediately.

- ➔ Do not talk about the specifics of the accusation with anyone except your attorney. Tell anyone who is asking questions, "Once I obtain legal advice, I will provide a response."
- ➔ Do not sign anything unless you have consulted with your attorney or CEA UniServ Rep. Know who your UniServ Rep is. Go to [cea.org/cea-staff/#uniserv](http://cea.org/cea-staff/#uniserv) for a list of UniServ Reps and their corresponding districts.

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and representation. Your local Association president or UniServ Representative can advise you as to your rights and recourse you may have.

- **Be prepared for an administrator's reaction.** A few administrators may feel threatened by the presence of a union representative. Some may even indicate they will not allow a representative to be present. If this is the case, do not say anything during the meeting, but reiterate your request for representation.
- **How to request your Weingarten Rights:** "If this discussion could in any way lead to my being disciplined or terminated or affect my personal working conditions, I respectfully request that my union representative, officer, or steward be present at this meeting. Until my representative arrives, I choose not to participate in this discussion."

# Frequently Asked Questions

## 1. What are my rights as a nontenured teacher regarding termination?

School boards must follow a specific statutory process when dismissing both tenured and nontenured teachers. The process requires notice, a hearing, and a right to appeal. When you are a newly hired teacher, you are nontenured, and your district could decide not to renew your employment for any reason prior to May 1 of your fourth year of teaching.

Connecticut statute (CGS 10-151), however, grants nontenured teachers certain rights, addressed below.

Nontenured teachers must be:

- a. Employed under a written contract
- b. Notified by May 1 if their contracts are not being renewed for the following year
- c. Given written reasons for termination or nonrenewal on request
- d. Allowed a hearing before the board of education or an impartial hearing panel on the termination
- e. Granted the right to appeal to Superior Court if the termination is for moral misconduct or disability

Before becoming tenured, teachers may be notified in writing by May 1 of each school year that their contracts will not be renewed for the coming year. The board does not have to specify any reason for nonrenewal unless the teacher files a written request for the reason within three calendar days of receiving the notice of nonrenewal. If the teacher makes such a request, the board must supply a reason within four calendar days following receipt of that request.

Nontenured teachers dismissed because their positions were eliminated have no right to a hearing. Otherwise, a nontenured teacher has ten calendar days after receiving notice of nonrenewal or termination to file a written request for a hearing, either before the board or, if the hearing request specifies it and the board designates, an impartial hearing panel appointed as described above. The hearing must begin within 15 calendar days of the request, unless the parties agree to an extension of not more than 15 calendar days, and must be conducted in the same way as a tenured teacher's hearing.

## 2. What are my rights as a tenured teacher regarding dismissal?

A tenured teacher may be dismissed only for one or more of the following reasons:

- a. Inefficiency, incompetence, or ineffectiveness based on evaluations that comply with State Board of Education

- guidelines for evaluations
- b. Insubordination against reasonable board of education rules
- c. Moral misconduct
- d. Disability proven by medical evidence
- e. Elimination of the position to which he or she was appointed, as long as there is no other position for which the teacher is qualified—and subject to the applicable provisions of a collective bargaining agreement or local school board policy
- f. Other due and sufficient cause

## 3. Is there any other time a teacher's contract can be terminated?

Yes. Any teacher can be dismissed prior to 90 days after the date of hire, as you are not considered a teacher under the law until this time period has expired.

## 4. What should I do if I receive notice that my contract will not be renewed?

If your district informs you that you will not be renewed, do not resign until you have spoken to your local Association president and CEA UniServ Representative.

## 5. What should I look for in my contract?

If you notice any discrepancies regarding the following on your contract, contact your CEA representative—your local Association building representative or other official in your school—to get advice on resolving the issue. It could affect your salary now and in the future. After receiving your contract, verify the following information:

- When did you receive the contract?
- When must the contract be returned?
- Is the position full-time or part-time?
- What is the salary?
- Look at your salary schedule; were you placed correctly?
- Did they give you credit for a master's degree completed prior to hire?
- Are your years of experience accurate?
- Does the contract include compensation for additional positions/responsibilities (stipend positions)?
- How long do you have to correct your salary placement if it is wrong?

## 6. What is a grievance? How do I know if I have a grievance?

If you believe that a provision or portion of your collective bargaining agreement has been misinterpreted or misapplied, you may be able to file a grievance. If you believe you have a grievance, contact your local Association building representative or local president. Do not discuss

the matter with any administrator until you have consulted with your local Association. Be sure to act quickly; timelines may be short. If you have a concern that does not constitute a grievance, your union may still be able to assist through other avenues outside of the grievance process.

### 7. What happens if I move to a different district?

Since tenure is attained both by serving 40 continuous months in the same district and being offered a continuing contract for the following year, if you move to a different district before attaining tenure, you will need to complete additional time in your new district in order to attain it again. The amount of time you will need to complete will vary based upon whether the district is an alliance district or not (See [portal.ct.gov/SDE/Alliance-Districts/Alliance-Districts](http://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Alliance-Districts/Alliance-Districts).)

Connecticut General Statute (CGS) 10-151 provides more specifics on tenure, as does the State Department of Education website: [portal.ct.gov/sde](http://portal.ct.gov/sde).

### 8. When can I resign from my teaching contract?

If you need to resign from a position for which you already signed a contract, you should give the district 30 days' notice as a courtesy. Talk to your local Association president and CEA UniServ Representative before resigning to make sure your rights are protected.

Be sure to keep a copy of your contract and your collective bargaining agreement.

If anything in your contract is incorrect, contact your local Association president or building representative for assistance.

### 9. What options exist for lessening the burden of student debt?

Depending upon the type of federal student loan you carry, you may be eligible for some loan

To schedule a Degrees Not Debt workshop, ask your local president or UniServ Representative to contact Michele Ridolfi O'Neill, CEA Educational Issues Specialist, at [micheleo@cea.org](mailto:micheleo@cea.org).



forgiveness. NEA's Degrees Not Debt Program helps educate members about income-driven repayment plans and student loan forgiveness options. Navigating student debt forgiveness and income-driven repayment can be tricky, but CEA's Educational Issues Specialist, Michele Ridolfi O'Neill, offers a free workshop that takes about 1½ hours to deliver and covers information about these helpful money-saving programs.

- Income Driven Repayment Plans: [studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/understand/plans/income-driven](http://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/understand/plans/income-driven)
- Debt Repayment Estimator Calculator: [studentloans.gov/myDirectLoan/mobile/repayment/repaymentEstimator.action](http://studentloans.gov/myDirectLoan/mobile/repayment/repaymentEstimator.action)
- Teacher Loan Forgiveness and Teacher Loan Cancellation: [studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation](http://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation)
- Public Service Loan Forgiveness: [studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service](http://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service)

# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

## Your School Community Needs You

Quality schools build strong, stable communities. You can work with others in your school community to support social justice and ensure students and their families are part of a healthy, thriving community.

- **Know the issues.** NEA, CEA, and your local Association keep you informed about issues that impact your classrooms, students, and community. Visit [cea.org](http://cea.org) and [nea.org](http://nea.org) to learn the latest about school funding, federal education laws, and legislative issues. Talk with your colleagues about the impact of issues on your school and community so that you can make an informed decision about how to become part of a movement to make a change.

▪ **Register to vote.** Elected officials make most of the decisions that impact our schools and our communities. Luckily, we have

power at the ballot box to support candidates who make policies that benefit our students, their families, our profession, and our schools. If we fail to participate in the political process, we fail our students, our communities, and ourselves.

- **Vote.** Your vote matters—from school board elections, local officials, state legislators, and state officials to the election of the President of the United States.
- **Advocate for change and quality public education.** Civic engagement can directly improve the lives of our students and their families. By working with others on common issues, we can create a supportive environment for our public schools and our profession. Get involved outside your classroom in a cause that will make a difference in your community. Be an example for your students by engaging in civic issues and encouraging your students to work for changes they believe in through their own civic engagement.

## Civic Engagement Resources

- **Register to vote online.** It's easy. Visit [cea.org/vote](http://cea.org/vote) to register to vote or make changes to your name, address, or party affiliation.

- **Learn about elections in Connecticut.** Visit the Connecticut Secretary of State Election page, [portal.ct.gov/SOTS](http://portal.ct.gov/SOTS), to learn about upcoming elections.
- **Know the issues.** Visit [cea.org/news-and-info](http://cea.org/news-and-info) to learn about issues that impact Connecticut schools and communities. Visit NEA's Issues and Action site at [nea.org/home/IssuesAndAction.html](http://nea.org/home/IssuesAndAction.html) to learn about national concerns and initiatives that impact schools and communities. Contact your local Association leaders to learn what is happening at the local level.
- **Advocate and work locally for change.** Coordinate with school colleagues to push for measures important to educators. Educate and interact with local legislators and help elect those candidates who support public education and teachers. Let your own legislator at the Capitol know where you stand on the issues. (Find your legislator at [cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/cgafindleg.asp](http://cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/cgafindleg.asp))
- **Know your legislators** CEA's Report Card System evaluates legislators' voting records as well as their advocacy and efforts to advance CEA priorities over the two-year legislative cycle. These priorities include preserving collective bargaining, enhancing the teaching profession, protecting pensions, and supporting sound education policy that supports public education. The report card score also includes a holistic view of legislators' overall support of teachers and public education, advocacy of CEA priorities, and responsiveness to requests to meet with educators and CEA staff. Those with the highest report card scores, who have shown their commitment and support of public education and the rights of teachers, are true education champions and placed on the honor roll. To view the report card, visit [cea.org/legislator-report-card](http://cea.org/legislator-report-card).
- **Donate to education-friendly candidates.** The NEA Fund for Public Education is the Political Action Committee (PAC) of the National Education Association used to support and organize around candidates who support our public schools. Visit [NEAFund.org](http://NEAFund.org) to learn more about what the NEA Fund does and how to contribute.



# QUICK REFERENCE

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**CEA** The Connecticut Education Association—your state teachers union

**Collective Bargaining Agreement (aka the CBA or Contract)** The negotiated agreement between your union and the district board of education that outlines working conditions and conditions of employment

**Grievance** A complaint against an employer (typically an administrator) for a contractual violation

**Local or Local Association** Your local CEA affiliate in your school district

**Local President (LP)** The president of your local CEA affiliate and Association

**NEA** The National Education Association—your national teachers union, affiliated with CEA

**UniServ Representative** The CEA staff member who represents your district's local CEA affiliate and Association, negotiates your contract, and provides personnel assistance and collective bargaining support

## GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

**EL** English Learners

**IEP** Individualized Education Plan

**TEAM** Teacher Education and Mentoring

# STAY IN TOUCH WITH CEA



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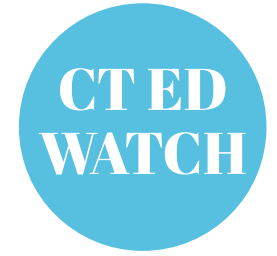
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[ctedwatch.org](http://ctedwatch.org)

**CEA** *Advisor*

**CEA Advisor**  
[cea.org/publications/  
cea-advisor](http://cea.org/publications/cea-advisor)

**CEA** **Building**  
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# FACEBOOK, SOCIAL NETWORKING, AND TEACHERS' FREE SPEECH

## What you need to know before making your next post, like, or tweet

Smartphones, tablets, and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter have the power to keep you plugged in 24 hours a day. They enable constant contact with friends, family, colleagues, and strangers and provide a platform for sharing personal news, political opinions, recipes, quips, quotes, and everyday achievements and frustrations.

While teachers believe they have the same free speech rights as anyone else, there continues to be a constitutional tug of war about individual rights and the district's right to limit them. Teachers need to be careful that what they post online isn't harmful or embarrassing to their school or inconsistent with the image of a teacher. Commenting online about school or district issues, controversial topics, or details of their personal lives can lead to disciplinary action.

"We talk to at least one teacher a week who has come into harm's way for using social media," says Rebecca Mitchell, CEA legal counsel. "It's such a common issue that we encourage teachers not to participate in social media and to refrain from posting on Facebook and Twitter."

**District policies** Over the past few years, Boards of Education across the state have adopted social media policies. Wallingford Public Schools adopted a policy in 2012 outlining exactly what is allowed and what isn't. The policy says

*The Board of Education recognizes the importance of social media for its employees, and acknowledges that its employees have the right under the First Amendment, in certain circumstances, to speak out on matters of public concern. In accordance with the provisions of the First Amendment, the Board will regulate the use of social media by employees, including employees' personal use of social media, when such use:*

1. *Interferes, disrupts or undermines the effective operation of the school district;*
2. *Is used to engage in harassing, defamatory, obscene, abusive, discriminatory or threatening or similarly inappropriate communications;*
3. *Creates a hostile work environment;*
4. *Breaches confidentiality obligations of school district employees; or*
5. *Violates the law, board policies and/or other school rules and regulations.*

Similar language is found in school districts across the state, from Farmington, Tolland, and

Stratford to Stamford, Norwich, and Danbury, and everywhere in between.

**Potential consequences** The casual nature of Facebook and Twitter and a growing acceptance of social networking have led to fewer and fewer inhibitions and a greater potential for lapses in judgment.

"Teachers are respected members of the community," says Adrienne DeLucca, CEA legal

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## Practical tips for social media from CEA's legal team

- Set strict privacy settings so that only your friends can see your photos and posts.
  - Be cautious about those whom you accept or invite as friends on social networks.
  - Do not friend or share posts with students or their parents.
  - Limit the amount of personal information you share.
  - Create a separate account if you are using social media for educational purposes or classroom lessons—keeping your professional and personal lives separate.
  - Do not post on personal networking sites during work hours.
  - Do not use a school computer to post. Rules may be more restrictive when teachers are using district-issued computers or the post is transmitted using the district's server. Even posts made on privately-owned devices (smartphones) using the school's Wi-Fi connection can be traced.
  - Do not post negative or offensive comments about your job, your administrator, your school, or your students or their families.
  - Check your social media profile and delete any inappropriate or questionable images, status updates, or communication dealing with alcohol, explicit sexual matters, violence, or vulgar language.
  - Do not send confidential information through social networks.
  - Always be skeptical and cautious.
  - Only post information you are comfortable with anyone seeing.
  - Do not post anything that could be considered harassing, discriminatory, or malicious.
  - Respect copyright and other intellectual property laws.
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counsel. “Whether they are working or on personal time, their conduct is always under a microscope. Maintaining respect and confidence is critical.”

CEA’s legal team says the incidence of alleged teacher misuse of social media is on the rise. They warn educators about some of the pitfalls of engaging in social media and strongly caution against it.

“Alleged misconduct or indiscretions displayed on social networking sites can damage the public’s trust and confidence in the teacher and can further be the subject of disciplinary action, including termination of employment, regardless of whether a teacher was on duty or off,” says Melanie Kolek, CEA legal counsel.

**Best practices** The best practice for education employees is to curtail the use of social media. But that may not be realistic, given

the growing trend of social media and because teachers, like everyone else, are almost certainly going to use social media to stay connected. Teachers should familiarize themselves with and follow relevant school policies, including the Connecticut Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators—also known as the code of conduct for teachers—to eliminate the possibility of inappropriate posts.

If you have a question about your district’s social media policy or general questions regarding social media usage, contact your UniServ Representative.







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