



SECTION 3

CAN'T-MISS
DISCIPLINE
STRATEGIES



Can't-Miss Discipline Strategies

During our collective 43 years in elementary and secondary school administration, we have made literally thousands of classroom observations. During these observations, we have noticed certain strategies that consistently have a positive impact on student behavior and academic performance. These strategies are powerful and easy to use. Each strategy involves a commonsense approach that most teachers are well aware of but sometimes forget to emphasize.

This section provides summaries of these strategies with the hope that you can find ways to use them in your professional life. Most of the strategies apply to the classroom setting, but some of them have buildingwide application. We have organized this section using the discipline component system that was reviewed earlier, categorizing by relationship strategies, parameter strategies, monitoring strategies, and consequence strategies.

Relationship Strategies

We strongly believe that positive relationships form the foundation of a positive discipline plan. In Chapter 1, we built a case for making positive teacher-student relations the largest portion of your discipline plan. In this chapter, we share specific strategies that teachers and other staff members can use to help develop strong relationships with students, which in turn help decrease the number of student discipline incidents. We also share some strategies you can use to develop positive relations with parents. Such relationships help to dramatically increase your positive power over students because the students know that you and their parents are working together rather than being at odds with each other. Below we list 12 strategies and expand on how you can put them to work for you.

Don't Be One of the Kids

There are some teachers who fail to enforce various rules because they want students to like them. This is unprofessional and results in the teacher's losing the respect of both students and staff members. When teachers try to act more like students than teachers, they undermine the buildingwide discipline system and help to create a morale issue throughout the building. Do you have favorites? Do you look the other way with some kids? Not only is this type of behavior a liability to the buildingwide discipline plan; it also negatively affects the building atmosphere. It is important for you to be professional with students and to show clearly by your words and actions that, while you value and care about your students, you are in charge and

they must treat you with respect and not as a friend or peer. This should be consistent behavior that you display with all your students.

Never Use Humiliation or Sarcasm

Some teachers think it is all right to use sarcasm because it creates a humorous situation that makes the students laugh. But humor that comes at the expense of a student's dignity is always unwise, unprofessional, and inappropriate. It also sets a dangerous pattern that is often emulated by students. Teachers often have no idea what personal situations a student might be facing, and a student who seems secure enough to handle the sarcasm may be devastated when the sarcasm is coupled with a personal problem the teacher is unaware of.

Tip Box

The bottom line: Sarcasm is dangerous, cruel, and unprofessional and should not be used in schools.

Start Parent Conferences with Positive Statements

A major goal for every parent conference is to increase the understanding, communication, respect, and cooperation between the parents and the teacher. When this occurs, the likelihood of the parents and school working together to meet the needs of students increases dramatically.

One of the first messages you should communicate during a parent conference is that you care about their child. When parents realize you appreciate and value their son or daughter, they are more likely to work cooperatively with the school. Remember, parents see their child as a reflection of themselves. Consequently, when you compliment a student, you are also complimenting the parents. There will be time in the meeting to discuss any concerns you have. Starting a conference by complimenting and enumerating the positive aspects of a child in no way limits the opportunity to discuss problems.

Start Difficult Conferences with the Student Outside of the Room

One of the most destructive things to a teacher's authority that a student can witness is an argument between a teacher and a parent. If there is any possibility the conference might not go well, start the meeting with the student outside of the room. After the difficult issues have been settled and a strategy that both you and the parents can support is in place, the student can be asked to join the conference.

Let the Parents Get Their Message Out First

No matter what issue you want to discuss with parents in a conference concerning their child, first listen to what the parents have to say. If you don't, they won't hear anything you have to say. Do everything you can to assure the parents you are listening, including making eye contact, taking notes, nodding your head at appropriate times, paraphrasing main points, and acknowledging their point. If the parents think you don't care about their issues, they won't be as inclined to care about yours.

Make Some Concessions

Whenever possible during a conference, find points that a parent makes that you can agree with or apologize for something that you did that upset the parent. For example, if a father says that you didn't let him know soon enough that the student was struggling, concur, saying, for example, "I probably should have called you sooner." This validates his concern and lets him know that the issue is not to establish blame but to work together to solve the problem.

Talk About the Future

As soon as possible in a parent conference, begin talking about the future, making a plan with parents and students to remedy whatever problem exists rather than getting stuck on the past. For example, if the issue is that a student is not completing his or her homework, establish the problem and then move on to develop a plan regarding how to be sure the homework is

completed in the future and how to improve communication between the teacher and the parents regarding any missed work.

Call Parents Before a Disciplined Student Gets Home

When you discipline or correct a student, there is always the possibility the student will give his or her parents a skewed version of what happened. Students typically leave out critical information in an effort to make it appear that they did nothing wrong and were treated unfairly. Often parents buy students' stories and become upset with you. In some situations, the issue festers until a parent angrily contacts the school to deal with you. At this point, you are faced with the difficult task of calming the parent down and presenting the correct facts.

Taking a few minutes to proactively contact a parent before a disciplined student gets home often saves you a headache. This procedure usually prepares the parent for the student's stories and prevents a parent blowup that is based on misinformation. Also, proactive communication is usually appreciated by parents.

There is no question that teachers do a better job of reporting unbiased and factual information to parents than students do. When considering the importance of making a proactive parent contact, ask yourself who you want reporting the "facts" to the parent, the student or you?

Tip Box

Remember: Every student has a PhD in parent manipulation, so be proactive!

Actively Encourage Parents to Call the School

Far too often, parents hear rumors about school incidents that make no sense. Most of the time, this information is inaccurate. When parents do not contact the school to check the stories out, they can form negative opinions about the school or a teacher. In an effort to head off these situations, teachers and administrators should continually urge parents to contact the school any time they have questions or concerns that bother them. When doing so, let the parents know that the school welcomes and appreciates their questions.

School bulletins, parent conferences, and back-to-school events are great opportunities to remind parents that they should not hesitate to interact with building staff. You should also provide parents with building and classroom phone numbers and the best times to call.

Increase the Power of Praise

Being specific when you give praise to students helps to create a positive learning situation because it clearly lets all your students know the type of behaviors and performances you are looking for. General statements of approval, such as “Good job” or “That’s great” do not communicate what a student did to warrant them. Nonspecific praise can cause students to think they earned compliments for the wrong reason. An example of specific praise is, “Your writing has improved significantly since you have increased the use of examples and clarified your authorial voice.”

Another way to increase the power and impact of praise is to make it personal by simply stating the student’s name. Also remember that it is important that your remarks be sincere and justified. Students will react negatively even to positive feedback when it is manipulative and not deserved.

Be careful to consider the age of your students when giving praise. Sprick (1985) states that compliments given to older students in front of their peers can be embarrassing and unwanted. In these cases, you might consider commending the student in a private manner. You can also use an alternative method of praise, such as sending home a letter or rewarding a student with a certificate. With younger students, public approval is often desired and effective. Praise needs to be developmentally appropriate.

Smile and Greet the Students

Wong and Wong (1998) suggest that standing by the door each morning as the students enter the classroom is a great way to let students know not only that you enjoy your job and care about each student, but that you are also actively paying attention to the students and observing their actions. Individually greeting your students as they enter the classroom is an effective strategy for both relationship building and monitoring student behavior.

Learn Students' Names

When you address a student by his or her name, it dignifies the student and communicates two things: “You’re important enough for me to know your name” and “You’re more than just another student to me.” Students are quick to realize that you do not know their names. When you use words like “you” or when you call them by the wrong name, there is a strong likelihood that they will believe you do not respect or value them.

You should take the time to learn students’ names as quickly as possible. This can be a difficult process, depending on how many students you have. Techniques for learning students’ names include the following:

- Studying the school annual, and put names with faces
- Looking for defining characteristics of each student
- Studying the roster at the end of the day, and visualize each student
- Putting students’ pictures in your seating chart

Tip Box

Note: It’s a good idea to have the students say their names the first time you meet them so that you know how to pronounce each name correctly.



Parameter Strategies

Relationships are the foundation of a strong, positive discipline plan. But stopping with the foundation is insufficient; the second component in a strong discipline plan is the establishment and articulation of clearly defined parameters of acceptable student behaviors. In Chapter 2, we addressed why clear parameters are important, what they consist of, how to establish them, and how to teach them to students. In this chapter, we offer some specific strategies that school staff members can use to help sharpen these parameters to proactively decrease disciplinary problems.

Teach the Discipline Plan and Rules of Conduct

Students learn what they are taught. Why must you teach anything? The answer is obvious: If a subject is not taught, students will most likely fail to learn it. This is why you don't just say to your math students, "Know your math facts," and then move on to the next topic. Instead, you formally teach each aspect of every math concept in a step-by-step, planned process. The same instructional procedures should apply to your discipline plan and rules of conduct. Although this strategy was covered in an earlier section (see Chapter 3), we think it is important enough to be mentioned again.

The best time to teach the discipline plan and rules of conduct is at the beginning of the year. You must, however, be prepared to reteach any aspect of the discipline plan or rules of conduct if your students' behavior makes it apparent they have forgotten the rules or are not complying with them. A key time for such reteaching is after a long break or vacation.

Teach and Enforce a Classroom Signal

One of the most important things you can teach your students the first day of school is your signal. Whatever your signal is, when you make it, all students should immediately stop what they are doing and give you their undivided attention. A signal should be used during transition periods, prior to giving students instruction, and any other time you need every student's complete attention.

Tip Box

Warning: If you give a signal and continue your instruction before verifying that every student has appropriately responded to the signal, students will soon realize that the signal is not important. Also, if one student is allowed to disobey the signal, other students will begin to ignore it as well.

Get the “Junk” Off the Desks

Paperback books, CD players, dolls, and other items often wind up on desks during classroom instruction. Each of these items is a potential distraction for the student. This distraction can be eliminated by directing students to put all items that are not needed for the lesson in their desks or on the floor.

Tip Box

Rule of thumb: If it's not needed for the lesson, it shouldn't be on the desk.

Teach the Logic Behind the Rules

Students, like adults, are more likely to support rules that are logical. Canter and Canter (1997) state that students at intermediate grade levels want to know the reasons for specific rules and how following these rules will help them do better in school. Whereas the logic behind your rules may seem obvious to you, you should not assume that students understand that logic. Students view rules from a different perspective, and what makes sense to you does not always make sense to them. The logic behind some rules, such as bans on gum chewing and hat wearing, truly escapes students. Taking the time to deliberately review rationales for the rules often results in students' being more accepting of them and willing to follow them.

Post Classroom Rules

One of the most common arguments parents and students have against a consequence for misbehavior is that the teacher failed to make the student aware of the rules and consequences. Usually the teacher has communicated this information, but the parent remains skeptical. Posting the rules by the classroom door is an extremely effective way to make certain that there is no question the rules have been communicated to the students on a daily basis. If parents or students claim not to be aware of the rule, you can remind them that the rule not only was taught to the students at the beginning of the year, but also is posted by the door.

Posting the rules is also a reminder to the teacher. Seeing the rules on the wall helps teachers remember the importance of consistently monitoring and enforcing their discipline policies.

Post Building Rules

Buildingwide rules should be posted in locations that are clearly visible to the students every day, such as next to classroom doors. When building rules are posted in areas frequented by both students and staff, including hallways and entrances to common areas in the building, everyone is reminded of the rules and the importance of compliance on a daily basis. An effective procedure to use with parents who claim their child was not aware of a rule is to show them the posted rules and point out that the students see the rules all the time.

Figure 10.1 is an example of a list of buildingwide rules that can be posted in visible locations throughout the school.

Establish a Buildingwide Signal

Some schools use a single signal for the entire building. As the students hear the signal year after year, they become very familiar with it. Substitutes, librarians, and other specialists appreciate the consistency of a buildingwide signal. Also, a buildingwide signal is very helpful during assemblies. Figure 10.2 gives an example of a buildingwide signal and what it means to students.

FIGURE 10.1
BUILDINGWIDE RULES

1. *Violence*: Violence of any type will not be tolerated. Any student who hits someone for any reason (even if he or she was hit first) will be suspended immediately.
2. *Harassment (verbal or physical)*: Harassment will result in immediate consequences, including detention, Friday school, or suspension.
3. *Gang-related issues*: Students who show any gang affiliation (e.g., tattoos, gang slogans, gang-related statements or gestures) will be suspended immediately pending a parent conference and/or hearing with a district police officer.
4. *Racial and sexual harassment*: Verbal, physical, or written statements involving sexual harassment or racial harassment will result in immediate suspension.
5. *Hugging and other physical contact*: Hugging and other physical contact are inappropriate at school and will result in lunch detention.
6. *Unexcused absences*: Unexcused absences will be made up in after-school detentions. Cumulative unexcused absences will result in enforcement of state attendance laws.
7. *Tardies*: Students who are not in their seats when the bell rings will be assigned a lunch detention. Cumulative violations will result in after-school detention and parent conferences.
8. *Hall passes*: Students in the hallway during class time must have a teacher-issued hall pass.
9. *Gum chewing*: Gum chewing is not allowed and will result in lunch detention.
10. *Food and beverages*: Food and beverages are not allowed in the hallways.
11. *Beepers, pagers, cellular phones, laser pointers, personal radios, CD players, electronic devices, cameras*: These items are not allowed at school and will be confiscated. Parents may pick up confiscated beepers, cellular phones, and laser pointers. Students may pick up other items after two weeks.
12. *Skateboards and roller blades*: Skateboards and roller blades are not allowed at school. If students bring these items to school, they will be confiscated. Students may pick them up after two weeks.
13. *Skipping class or being removed from after-school detention*: Students who skip class or must be removed from after-school detention due to disciplinary problems will be placed in Friday school.
14. *Athletes who receive after-school detention or Friday school*: Athletes who are placed in after-school detention or Friday school will miss one athletic event.
15. *Lateness*: Students who are late to school due to a nonemergency, such as missing the bus or getting up late, will receive lunch detention that day.
16. *Dance attendance*: Students who are suspended or placed in Friday school will not be allowed to attend one dance.

FIGURE 10.2
BUILDINGWIDE SIGNAL

"Give me your attention, please" means the following:

- Feet flat on the floor
 - Eyes looking forward at the speaker
 - Hands still
 - Ears listening
 - Mouths quiet
-

Provide Support for Substitutes

The challenge of coming into a new classroom where the students are unfamiliar and classroom procedures are new can be huge for substitute teachers. Students should be taught that they must treat a substitute as respectfully as they treat their regular teacher. Among the many ways classroom teachers can help substitutes are the following:

- Maintaining an accurate seating chart
- Identifying a staff member substitutes can check with if they need help
- Listing the classroom/buildingwide consequences for rule violations
- Communicating to students the expectation that they are to behave for substitutes the same way they should behave for their teacher
- Asking a neighboring teacher to take the most difficult students while the substitute is in the classroom



Monitoring Strategies

Once you have established clear parameters for acceptable student behaviors, you need to ensure that students are following them. In Chapter 3, we discussed four main monitoring strategies that should be part of every teacher’s repertoire. In this chapter, we cover some additional monitoring strategies for reducing the number of discipline problems in your school.

Move Around the Room

Moving around the room to maintain proximity with individual students was thoroughly reviewed during the discussion of monitoring skills in Section 1. Its power and impact are so significant that we are listing it again as a “can’t-miss” approach and including some more specific examples of how to put it into practice.

Ask yourself how you can arrange desks to make it easier to get close to your students, thereby eliminating barriers between you and them. Marzano (2003) identifies these critical criteria for room arrangement:

- You can easily see all students.
- Students can easily see all presentations and demonstrations.
- Frequently used materials are easily accessible.
- Pathways facilitate traffic flow.
- It is easy to organize students into pairs, triads, and small groups.
- The room does not provide or highlight unnecessary distractions. (p. 94)

Student desks or tables should be arranged so that it is easy for you to quickly move into close proximity to any student at any time during instruction. The next few figures show several examples of arrangements that let you do just that. In Figure 11.1, the teacher can easily move up to every desk in the classroom, can walk between all the desks to get closer to the students, and can even teach from the front, center, or back of the classroom. This arrangement can be used at elementary and secondary levels.

FIGURE 11.1
DESK ARRANGEMENT

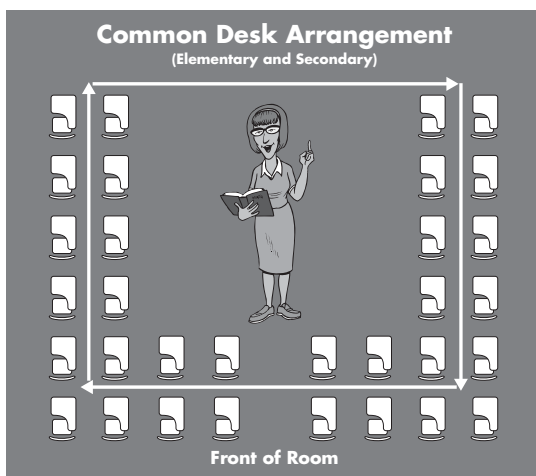


Figure 11.2 shows a common arrangement used in classrooms in which students are seated at tables. In this arrangement, the teacher can easily monitor two aisles of tables by walking between the rows. This can be used at either the elementary or secondary levels.

FIGURE 11.2
TABLE ARRANGEMENT

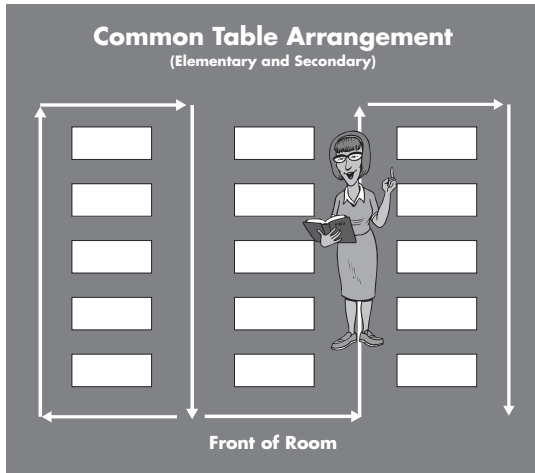
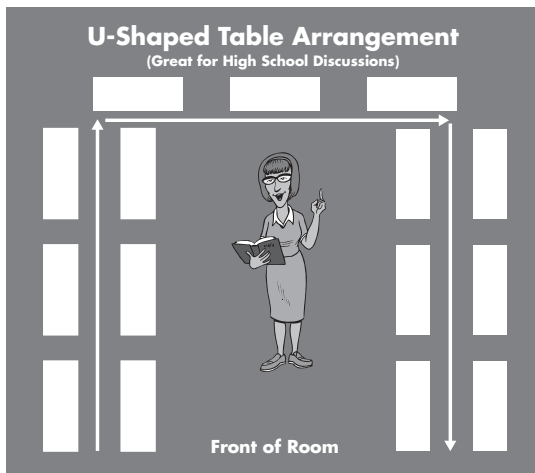


Figure 11.3 shows a U-shaped table arrangement that provides for easy accessibility to students and close monitoring by the teacher. This arrangement is especially useful and effective in a classroom in which there are many student discussions.

FIGURE 11.3
U-SHAPED TABLE ARRANGEMENT



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A major question that needs to be addressed in setting up the classroom is, *Where should the teacher's desk go?* Thompson (1998) says that an obvious mistake that many teachers make is placing their desks at the front of the room. She says it's better practice to place the desk at the back of the room or in one of the back corners because then teachers can monitor students without letting them know they're being watched. You need to consider which is the best for your classroom.

In summary, the position and arrangement of student desks or tables and the teacher's desk can have an impact on the teacher's ability to monitor students and is worth careful thought and consideration.

Call on Students at Any Time

During teacher-led discussions, it is important for every student to be actively thinking about the topic that is being discussed. If students know they will not be required to participate in the discussion, they are more likely to be off task. You have to be certain that your instructional style does not communicate that you will not call on certain students during class discussions. Usually there are students who look bored, rarely volunteer a response, or typically struggle with response opportunities. When you fail to call on these students, there is an increased likelihood that they will remain disinterested in the topic and be off task.

One of the most common ways teachers "give permission" for students to tune out is by communicating that if they keep their hands down, they will not be required to participate in the discussions. There is nothing wrong with calling on students with their hands raised, but it can create problems if you call exclusively on students with their hands raised. Employing a balanced approach by calling on students whether their hands are raised or down helps to keep all the students attentive and on task.

Following is a list of some of the common mistakes to avoid when calling on students:

- Using a set and predictable pattern (e.g., starting with names that begin with "A")
- Calling a student's name before asking the question
- Calling on the same student repeatedly and not calling on other students
- Calling on a student only once over a long period of time
- Only calling on students with their hands raised

Some strategies that you can use to communicate to your students that any of them could be called on at any time include the following:

- Draw student names at random.
- Call on students with their hands down more often than those with their hands raised.
- Direct all students to give the answer to the question to their neighbors.
- Require every student to write the answers to your questions on scratch paper or on individual blackboards.

Eliminate Blind Spots During Classroom Transitions

Far too often, teachers allow students to become spread out as they transition from one location in the building to the next. Also, teachers often escort students through the building in a manner that limits their direct view of the students. This typically happens as students go around corners or enter rooms. In these scenarios, blind spots are inevitable, and problems can occur while the teacher is not monitoring the situation.

It is important that your students do not get too spread out when moving from one building location to the next. Escorting your students in a manner that maximizes your ability to directly observe them as they go around building corners is also beneficial. Telling the first student in line to stop at a corner or door entrance until you get to that spot does a great deal to eliminate blind spots. Finally, walking behind the students during transition periods helps you keep every student in your direct line of sight.

Go to the Students When They Need Help

In some classrooms, students are instructed to go to the teacher's desk when they need help with their seat work. This procedure is unwise and can create many classroom problems. Students often visit with friends and cause disruptions as they walk to the teacher's desk. Because the students wait for your assistance at a location other than their desks, time that could have been productive if they had remained at their desks and continued working while waiting is wasted. Students who are lined up at your desk also can block your view of the rest of the class—this makes it difficult to monitor the class.

You should consider implementing a policy that requires students to raise their hands when they need help. A system that some teachers use is that students put up a small “help flag” when they need help. The teacher can then move from desk to desk to provide the needed assistance. A strategy that Wong and Wong (1998) suggest is giving each student a toilet paper tube that has been painted red on one end so that they can stand the tube with the red side up when they need help. Another strategy they suggest is using an index card that says “Help” on one side and “Keep working” on the other. Students are taught that when they need help, they put the card up with the “Help” side facing the teacher and the “Keep working” side facing the student—a call for help from the teacher and a reminder to the student to keep working until the teacher comes over.

Maximize Wait Time

The goal during class discussions is to get students thinking about the topic being discussed and preparing to answer any question they might be asked. The time that elapses between the moment you ask the entire class a question and the moment you call on an individual student is prime thinking time because all the students realize they might be called on to answer the question.

Sometimes when conducting class discussions, teachers will pose a question to the entire class but then immediately call on an individual student. This lets all the other students off the hook, allowing them not to have to think about the question. Prolong the wait time before calling on someone. When you increase the time period during which students feel they might be responsible for answering a specific question, you are also increasing the amount of time students will intently think about the question. Also, when you use this strategy consistently, it shows that you have high expectations for everyone (Kerman et al., 1980).

Correct Nondisruptive Off-Task Behavior

It is important to note and correct off-task behavior, even when a student engaging in such behavior is not bothering anyone else. Examples include situations in which students passively resist the teacher’s instructions, day-dream during class discussions, sleep, write notes, or doodle.

It's easy to ignore nondisruptive off-task behaviors because they typically don't cause a classroom disturbance or distract other students. However, ignoring them has a number of negative effects. First, the student who is involved in the nondisruptive behavior remains off task and is not involved in the learning process. Also, as other students observe that such behavior is ignored by the teacher, they absorb the message that these actions are acceptable.

One of the easiest and most effective monitoring techniques you can use to quickly stop nondisruptive off-task behavior is proximity. Moving toward a student who is on the wrong page or daydreaming will usually bring him or her back to the class discussion. If monitoring procedures fail to stop the nondisruptive off-task behavior, you should employ other strategies to nip the problem in the bud.

Take Roll Silently

Many teachers start class by calling the name of each student as they take roll. This process takes a significant amount of time away from classroom instruction, decreases the ability to monitor students, and creates a potential for disruption. When hearing their names called off, students can respond in a way that is inappropriate. Statements such as "Yeah," "What do you want?" and "He's over there" are some examples.

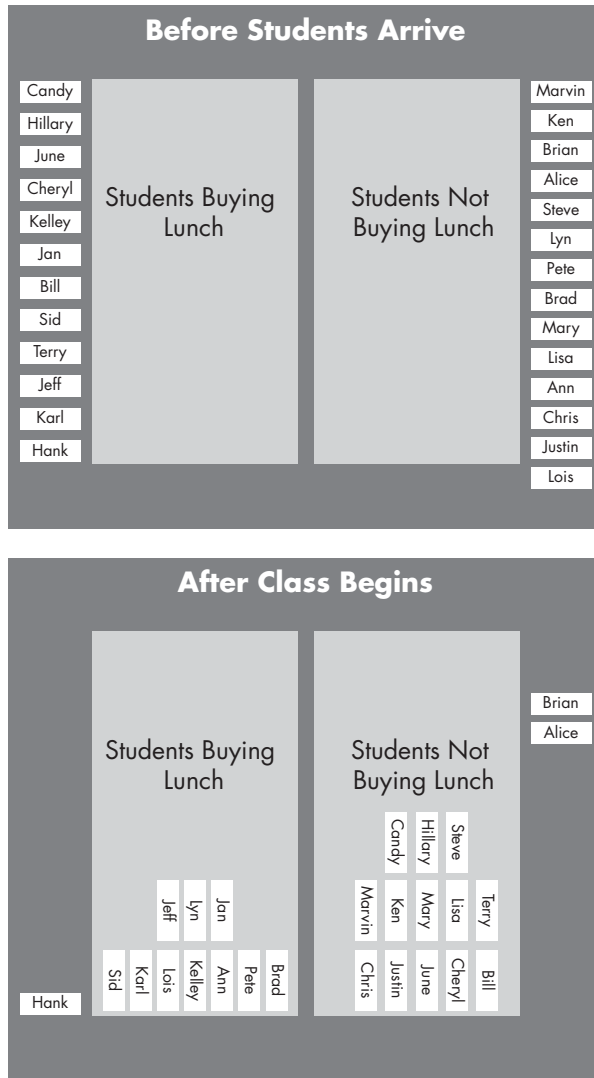
A better approach is to have the students begin an assignment the moment they enter the room. While the students are completing their assignment, you can check your seating chart and silently take roll.

Another alternative some teachers use is for students to "take their own roll" by moving their names on a chart, placing it either on the side indicating they are buying lunch or on the side indicating they are not buying lunch. (See Figure 11.4 for illustrations of such a system.) This can be done silently as students enter the room. The names left on the borders are the students who are absent. The drawback is that one student could move another student's name as a way to help out a friend.

Use Sponge Activities

Free time in class often translates to an increase in nonproductive activities and a greater likelihood of disruptive and off-task student behavior.

FIGURE 11.4
ROLL-TAKING ALTERNATIVE



Sponge activities are learning opportunities provided for students when they might otherwise have free, unstructured class time. An example of a sponge activity is a warm-up assignment on the board that students know they are to work on as soon as they enter the classroom.

Sponge activities are typically given to students when they enter the room, during roll taking, and when students complete their work early. This is a proactive strategy that, when used routinely, decreases opportunities for students to misbehave, allows the teacher to monitor the class, and provides additional learning time for students.

Remember the Three “Make or Break” Times

There are typically three times during the day when the likelihood of students getting off task or becoming disruptive is very high: when students enter the classroom, transition times, and the last two minutes of class. These are the times when most classroom disruptions occur and when the majority of office referrals are made. It is especially important to monitor students during these times. “Make or break” times create a classroom atmosphere that can have either a negative or a positive impact on learning and classroom structure.

You should do everything possible to create and maintain a structured and orderly environment during these “make or break” times. Some ways to do this include avoiding free time altogether, teaching routines and procedures for transitions, continually monitoring your students, and maintaining an academic focus during these times.

Change Hall Passes

It is inevitable that some students will steal hall passes and use them without permission. Changing the color of hall passes each month on a buildingwide basis will make old hall passes useless.

Encourage Students to Leave the Building

Often students will walk through the halls and attempt to enter classrooms long after the school day is finished. These students create supervision problems and distractions for staff. A good way to encourage the students to leave at the end of the day is for the principal to go on the public address system 15 minutes after the final bell and remind students they are to leave the building if they are not involved in an organized school activity. Informing students that if they remain in the hallways they will receive lunch detention can give them a strong incentive to leave.

Stagger Passing Periods

When large numbers of students are in the hallways at any one time, the likelihood of fights and disruptions increases dramatically. Also, it can be very difficult for staff to supervise that many students. Staggering the passing periods in order to lessen the number of students transitioning at one time can help to improve student behavior and improve supervision issues.

