

# Intentional Instructional Moves

Strategic Steps to  
Accelerate Student  
Learning

## Companion Guide

Chapter 3: Intentional Step Two



## Chapter 3

### **Intentional Step Two: Establish Classroom Norms and Expectations**

At the beginning of the year, teachers should establish clear norms and expectations for classroom behavior. If possible, involve students in the process of co-creating these expectations. Based on the Quaglia Institute’s national survey, only 38% of elementary students felt they were able to help create classroom rules (2024a). But co-creating norms helps students feel involved and holds them accountable. They can discuss acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and take ownership of their actions. Co-creating class rules also reinforces the belief that students’ ideas matter and are valued by others.

Class norms should include guidelines for behavior (respect, courtesy, preparation, listening skills) as well as procedures (how to accomplish something, such as turning in work). Explain what is expected, why it matters, and what happens if students don’t meet these expectations. Post the class rules in the classroom using a visual display, such as a poster, Google Slides, or Canva (Benner, 2023). Teach students how to follow these standards and refer back to them regularly. Provide regular feedback on student behaviors, including praise, redirection, and correction.

Relatedly, teachers should introduce clear learning intentions at the beginning of a unit. Like classroom expectations, learning intentions keep students focused and on-task. They organize the unit of study and its related activities and offer students a clear goal to work toward. Learning intentions also remind students that they can rely on the teacher for guidance and direction. For tips on creating effective learning intentions, see Chapter 7.

### Reflection Questions:

- How should students treat the teacher?
- How should students treat their peers?
- How should they interact with classroom materials and equipment?
- How should students behave at the pencil sharpener, drinking fountains, sink, etc.?
- How should they behave during group work? And individual work?
- How should they behave during teacher-led activities?
- How should they behave during presentations?
- How should they behave during discussions?
- What should students do when they've completed their work?
- How should students move around the classroom?
- What will you do when there are interruptions or delays?

### Strategy 1: Role-Playing

Students act out a common classroom scenario so they can practice appropriate behaviors. For instance, students can role play how to use the pencil sharpener. First, the teacher will introduce the scenario and the appropriate behaviors. Then, the teacher and/or a small group of students can act out acceptable uses of the pencil sharpener and unacceptable uses. The class will then discuss the examples and how they fit with the class guidelines. Teachers can also have students role play asking for help, turning in assignments, or transitioning between activities.

Role playing lets students practice desirable behaviors in a safe, low-stakes environment. Students can explore the classroom guidelines and learn how to interact with others and the physical space. They will learn what they should do, how to do it, and what to do if they forget

the rules, make a mistake, or see others breaking the rules. This teaches them valuable skills in leadership, self-judgment (.62) and positive peer influence (.53).

### Strategy 2: Reminders and Cues

Teachers remind students of appropriate behaviors and refer back to the classroom norms and expectations. It's beneficial to post the class rules in a highly visible and accessible place so students can see them and teachers can refer to them. When students aren't meeting the expectations, the teacher can point to the rules and restate them. They can also cue students to think about the appropriate behaviors by holding a finger to their lips (to signal to be quiet) or asking students to restate the class norms and expectations. For example, if students are chatting with their peers during independent work time, the teacher can remind them of the expectations for this type of activity and then check in with the students who are talking. The students might have a question or the teacher might need to rearrange the desks so students are less distracted. For more tips on prompts and cues, see Chapter 11.

Reminders and cues help reinforce classroom rules and procedures. They also encourage students to take responsibility for their behaviors and recognize when they are straying from class expectations (self-regulation, .52). Reminders and cues aren't the same as reprimands; rather they're intended to help redirect and refocus students so they can continue learning and growing.

### Strategy 3: Quieting a Noisy Class

As in the opening scenario, classrooms can be noisy and boisterous, no matter the age of the students. But teachers can use several non-verbal techniques to capture the attention of excited students and help them refocus:

- ❖ Flick the lights in the classroom to signal that it's time to be quiet, and/or a transition is coming.
- ❖ Capture students' attention using sounds, such as wind chimes, a bell, or a rain stick.
- ❖ Clap Back - The teacher claps and students clap back in response. When the teacher claps initially, the students will hear the sound, stop, and listen for what's next. Teachers can also try pattern clapping, where the teacher claps a pattern (like two short claps and one long), and students repeat the pattern; or, the teacher can clap a particular pattern and students will answer with a different pattern; teachers can use silent clapping; or Clap and Freeze, where the teacher instructs the class that when they hear the clap, they must freeze in place and quiet their voices until the teacher provides directions (Sager, 2023).

Non-verbal techniques like flicking the lights and clapping are simple and effective ways to get students' attention and help them think about their behavior. Students of all ages can learn these cues and begin to engage in self-regulation (.52). Helping students learn when it's appropriate to be loud and talkative and when they need to be quiet and focused is an extremely valuable life skill, one they can take with them into college and careers.