



Special Education Department

Teaching Tips for Students with Special Needs

Each and every special needs child is an individual so your teaching style will be dictated by the unique challenges each child faces. To help you succeed in teaching special needs students in general, however, you should consider the following five teaching tips:

- Keep your classroom organized. Structure is very important for special needs students and it can be very helpful for you as a special education teacher. Whether you have one student to keep track of or twenty, sticking to a daily routine as much as possible will help both you and your students. Keeping your classroom organized will also help to minimize stress and distractions.
- Remember that each child is an individual. Every special needs student is unique so try to get to know your students as individuals instead of identifying them by their diagnosis. As a special education teacher you may be responsible for developing IEPs - not only are these a federal requirement, but they can be a helpful tool for you and the child's parents to come together to create an education plan that works for everyone.
- Give your students opportunities for success. Maintaining a positive outlook is incredibly important in a field as challenging as special education. Some days will be harder than others and some students will progress more slowly than others. Encourage your students to work hard and to improve by offering opportunities for small successes and then celebrate those successes.
- Create a support network. As a special education teacher, you will need to be able to work with your students' general education teachers as well as his therapists and parents. The more you communicate with everyone, the easier things will be and the more your student will benefit.



FAPE

Free Appropriate Public Education

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The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) says that each child who has a disability and needs special education and related services will receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).¹

Free: All students will be educated at public expense.

Appropriate: Education tailored to meet the needs of the student.

Public: Students have the right to public education.²

**INVISIBLE
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1. Individuals with Disabilities Act

2. Understood.org

Facts You May Not Know About Teachers

The following statements are generalized. Though each statement may not be true for every teacher, they are indicative of the thoughts, feelings, and work habits of the majority of teachers.

1. Teachers do not become teachers because they are not smart enough to do anything else. Instead, they become teachers because they want to make a difference in shaping young peoples' lives.
2. Teachers do not just work from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. with summers off. Most arrive early, stay late and take papers home to grade. Summers are spent preparing for the next year and at professional development opportunities.
3. Teachers get frustrated with students who have tremendous potential but do not want to put in the hard work necessary to maximize that potential.
4. Teachers love students who come to class every day with a good attitude and genuinely want to learn.
5. Teachers enjoy collaboration, bouncing ideas and best practices off of each other, and supporting each other.
6. Teachers respect parents who value education, understand where their child is academically and support what the teacher does.
7. Teachers are real people. They have lives outside of school. They have terrible days and good days. They make mistakes.
8. Teachers want a principal and administration that support what they are doing, provide suggestions for improvement and value their contributions to their school.
9. Teachers are creative and original. No two teachers do things exactly alike. Even when they use another teacher's ideas, they often put their own spin on them.
10. Teachers are continuously evolving. They are always searching for better ways to reach their students.
11. Teachers do have favorites. They may not come out and say it, but there are those students, for whatever reason, with whom they have a natural connection.
12. Teachers become irritated with parents who do not understand that education should be a partnership between themselves and their child's teachers.
13. Teachers are control freaks. They hate it when things do not go according to plan.
14. Teachers understand that individual students and individual classes are different and tailor their lessons to meet those individual needs.
15. Teachers do not always get along with each other. They may have personality conflicts or disagreements that fuel a mutual dislike, just as in any profession.
16. Teachers appreciate being appreciated. They love it when students or parents do something unexpected to show their appreciation.
17. Teachers generally do not like standardized testing. They believe it creates added unnecessary pressures on them and their students.
18. Teachers do not become teachers because of the paycheck; they understand that they are usually going to be underpaid for what they do.
19. Teachers dislike it when the media focuses on the minority of teachers who make mistakes, instead of on the majority who consistently show up and do their jobs on a daily basis.
20. Teachers love it when they run into former students who tell them how much they appreciated what they did for them.
21. Teachers hate the political aspects of education.
22. Teachers enjoy being asked for input on key decisions that the administration will be making. It gives them ownership in the process.
23. Teachers are not always excited about what they are teaching. There is usually some required content that they do not enjoy teaching.
24. Teachers genuinely want the best for all of their students: They never want to see a child fail.
25. Teachers hate to grade papers. It is a necessary part of the job, but it is also extremely monotonous and time-consuming.
26. Teachers are consistently searching for better ways to reach their students. They are never happy with the status quo.
27. Teachers often spend their own money on the things they need to run their classroom.
28. Teachers want to inspire others around them, beginning with their students but also including parents, other teachers and their administration.
29. Teachers work in an endless cycle. They work hard to get each student from point A to point B and then start over the next year.
30. Teachers understand that classroom management is a part of their job, but it is often one of their least favorite things to handle.
31. Teachers understand that students deal with different, sometimes challenging, situations at home and often go above and beyond to help a student cope with those situations.
32. Teachers love engaging in meaningful professional development and despise time-consuming, sometimes pointless professional development.
33. Teachers want to be role models for all of their students.
34. Teachers want every child to be successful. They do not enjoy failing a student or making a retention decision.
35. Teachers enjoy their time off. It gives them time to reflect and refresh and to make changes they believe will benefit their students.
36. Teachers feel like there is never enough time in a day. There is always more that they feel they need to do.
37. Teachers would love to see classroom sizes capped at 15 to 20 students.
38. Teachers want to maintain an open line of communication between themselves and their students' parents throughout the year.
39. Teachers understand the importance of school finance and the role it plays in education but wish that money was never an issue.
40. Teachers want to know that their principal has their back when a parent or student makes unsupported accusations.
41. Teachers dislike disruptions but are generally flexible and accommodating when they occur.
42. Teachers are more likely to accept and use new technologies if they are properly trained on how to use them.
43. Teachers become frustrated with the relatively few educators who lack professionalism and are not in the field for the right reasons.
44. Teachers dislike it when a parent undermines their authority by denigrating them in front of their children at home.
45. Teachers are compassionate and sympathetic when a student has a tragic experience.
46. Teachers want to see former students be productive, successful citizens later in life.
47. Teachers invest more time in struggling students than any other group and are thrilled by the "light bulb" moment when a student finally starts to get it.
48. Teachers are often scapegoats for a student's failure when in reality it is a combination of factors outside the teacher's control that led to failure.
49. Teachers often worry about many of their students outside of school hours, realizing that they do not always have the best home life.



Staff Highlights

Regina Stracener - CCHS

I have been a nurse for 11 years and at CCHS for 10 years. I attended NWSCC to complete my nursing degree. I love to spend time with my family, travel, and hike in the mountains. I have been married for 34 years to my husband Derek. We have 3 sons and a bonus daughter. We also have 3 wonderful grandchildren. When not working or traveling, I also work as a Disney Travel Planner. I love to help families book their vacations to Walt Disney World!



Kristen Burns - LES

I have a Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Special Education from the University of North Alabama. I have taught for 26 years in both Colbert County and Muscle Shoals City School Systems. I currently teach the LEAP-2 classroom at Leighton Elementary School.

Vickie Hunter - CHHS

I have been a nurse for 23 years and 13 of those as a school nurse. I graduated from NWSCC and I love watching sports. I am married to Scott and we have 3 kids - Adam, Brandon, and Halli.

Devori J. Stewart - HES

I have been a nurse for 6 years. I have a Licensed Practical Nursing Certificate and Associates Degree in Biblical Studies. I love God, reading, traveling, and singing. I'm married with 6 children and 3 grandchildren.





Staff Highlights

Sabrina Underwood – CCHS

I have been teaching for 7 years at CCHS. I graduated from Alexandria High School in 2000. In 2013, I earned my bachelor's degree from Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia. I am married to Jason Underwood, who is a former graduate of Colbert County High School. We have two children, Anna Kate and William. Anna is in the 2nd grade at Leighton Elementary. Will is a 10th grader at CCHS. I love nature and the outdoors. My hobbies include: camping, swimming, hiking, and kayaking.

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Keri Newton – CHS

I have been teaching for 7 years. I'm a 2009 graduate of Cherokee High School, 2012 graduate of Northwest Shoals Community College (associates in elementary education), 2015 graduate of the University of North Alabama (bachelors in elementary education), and a 2018 graduate of the University of North Alabama (masters in collaborative/special education). I'm married to Jake and we have a 3 year old daughter, Elli Blake. I enjoy coaching cheerleading, crafts, and playing with my daughter.





Staff Highlights

Tosha Maxwell – CHS

I've been a nurse for 9 years and I've been a nurse at CHS for two years. I graduated from Cherokee High School in 2007, Emergency Medical Technician Alabama Fire Science in 2009. I graduated from NWSCC in 2013 as a LPN and as a Registered Nurse in 2015. I am one of 5 siblings and an Aunt to 5 nephews. I have two little girls and I've been married for 13 years to Daniel. I love playing softball and watching my little girls dance. I enjoy being a school nurse and I love being available to the high school students. I like being someone they can talk to when they're having problems or when they are sick. I always want the students to know they have me to come to whenever an issue shall arise. I subbed in the county for 5 years before I became a full-time nurse here at CHS. I absolutely love my job!



Tanya Rawlings Fleming, RN BSN – CHES

I have been a nurse since 2008. This is my fourth year at CHES. The majority of my nursing career has been spent working in mental health/psychiatry. I attended Tuscumbia City Schools my entire school years and graduated from Deshler High School in 2003 (Go Tigers). I then attended the University of North Alabama and graduated with a BSN nursing in May 2008. (Roar Lions). I love traveling, especially cruises to tropical destinations and trips to Disney World. I am engaged and expecting my first child (a girl) in April 2023. I have 2 golden retrievers and 3 cats. I love children and taking care of kiddos in the school setting!





Staff Highlights

Michelle Deaton - CHHS

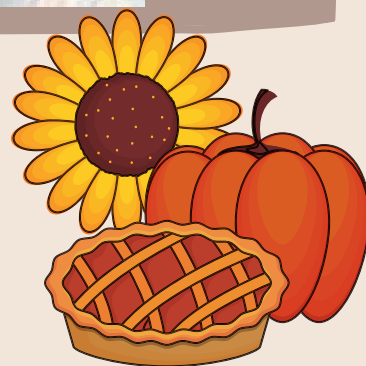
This is my 2nd year at CHHS, but my 20th year teaching. I have taught in Mobile, AL, Charlotte, NC, and Tishomingo, MS. I have a Bachelors Degree from UNA, Masters Degree from Mississippi College, and I am a National Board Certified Teacher. I am married to Nicky and we have 3 children. I love spending time with my husband, children, and golden retriever. We enjoy going for hikes, watching football, and listening to live music. Will (26), Caroline (23), and Scott (20).

William C. Hawkins - CHHS

I currently work at Colbert Heights High School. and I'm serving in my 3rd year as a Para Professional. My hobbies include coaching sports, family time, being a grandfather, and loving life itself. I attended the University of North Alabama and completed the 5 year program as a pipefitter. My family includes my wife and we share 3 kids who are 26, 21, and 16. We also have a grandson who is 5 years old. I currently coach varsity football at Colbert Heights and Jr. High basketball.



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Staff Highlights

Cortney Davis - LES

I have been a nurse for 12 years, 4 of those years as the school nurse at LES. I graduated as a Licensed Practical Nurse from Tennessee Technology Center. I have been married to my husband Nathan for 14 years. We have 3 daughters- Alona, Hallie, and Blakely. I enjoy traveling, concerts, the beach, and Alabama football. I love spending time with my family and friends and watching my daughters play sports.

Sandra Cooper - CCHS

I'm a Para Professional at CCHS and have worked in the school system for 30 years. I graduated from CCHS in 1977, attended college, and passed the Work Keys. I have 2 daughters, 1 son, and 2 grandchildren. I enjoy reading and doing crossword puzzles.

Cynthia Watson -Special Needs Bus Driver

I am the special needs bus driver. I carry my kids from Cherokee area to Leighton Elementary and Colbert County High School. I have been driving 20 years all together. I enjoy flower gardening and I love hummingbirds. I love watching and taking notes of all the things they do. I have had up to 40 feeding at one time. I also love the outdoors and taking pictures of it. I graduated from Muscle Shoals High School and have been married to Donald for 35 years. We have two daughters- Crystal Guyton and Brandi Logan. We also have 7 grandchildren- Brannon, Beau, Brock, Zachary, Zoey, Jen and Levi. When I got my bus license, I was told I would get a regular route quicker if I first took the special needs bus because most drivers don't want it since it's such a long route from Cherokee. So, I took it and could have changed routes many years ago, but these kids are truly special to me! I still talk to some of the ones who have finished school. They get so excited over the little things. Yes, there are hard days, but the good ones outnumber them by far. I love these kids and I will be a special needs diver till I retire. If I could tell people one thing it would be that if they meet a special needs child, they are just like any other child with feelings and need love just like them!





Staff Highlights

Vickie Dove - CHHS

I have been teaching for 20 years. I received a BSEd P-12 Special Education from Athens State University. I have an 11 year old son, Avery, and a Maltese named Sophie. I enjoy golfing and shopping in my free time.

Ben Floyd - CHS

This is my 2nd year of teaching and I was a Para for 6 years. I graduated from Deshler High School and Athens State University. I'm also the head football and baseball coach at CHS. I'm married to Maryanne and we have a 1 1/2 year old daughter, Anne Harland. I enjoy coaching football and baseball, working on cars, and enjoying the outdoors.

Mark Guntharp - CHHS

I am in my 4th year of teaching in Alabama. I have a background in Specialist Education Leadership and I enjoy watching ballgames.

Jerwan Thompson - CCHS

I have a B.S. in Business Management and have been teaching for one year. I have an older sister and love spending time with my family.

