

NEW TEACHER GUIDE 2023 2024

Strategies to make the most
of your first year

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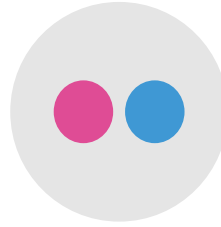
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NEW TEACHER GUIDE
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MY ASSOCIATION CONTACTS

Local President

President's Contact Information

Local Building Representative

Building Representative's Contact Information

CEA UniServ Rep

UniServ Rep's Contact Information



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 or call 860-525-5641.
- About how you can be considered for participation in state or local CEA committees: contact your local president.

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The Connecticut Education Association welcomes you to the teaching profession! As a CEA 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. Our national affiliate, the National Education Association, also offers resources at nea.org.

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YOUR UNION

CEA represents preK–12 public school teachers, counselors, social workers, and psychologists as well as retired teachers and college students preparing for teaching careers. Together, CEA members, leaders, and staff stand in solidarity to elevate the profession and public education. CEA is affiliated with the National Education Association (NEA), the nation's largest teachers' union, representing three million educators.

CEA advocates on behalf of educators at the state legislature, at the State Department of Education, at school board and town council meetings, in administrators' offices, and in the greater community, ensuring our members have the resources and time to teach, and students have the tools and time to learn. We advocate for everything from higher teacher salaries to

smaller class sizes, less standardized testing, greater input into curriculum, safe buildings, a secure retirement, and more.

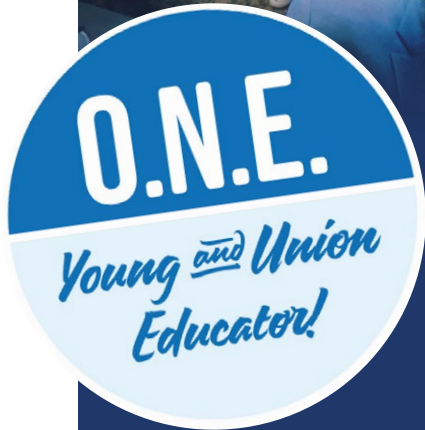
Better working conditions for our educators mean a better learning environment for our students.

Headquartered in Hartford, CEA has regional offices in Norwich, Trumbull, Waterbury, and Windsor. Organizations within CEA include CEA-Retired, serving retired teachers, and the CEA Aspiring Educators Program, which provides practical support and experiences for Connecticut's future educators. CEA's charitable arm, the Connecticut Education Foundation (CEF), assists educators and students facing financial hardships and provides scholarships for students pursuing teaching careers.



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- **Connecticut Education Association (CEA)** 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
- **National Education Association (NEA)** your national teachers' union
- **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



O.N.E. (Opportunity, Networking, Empowerment) Young and Union is a unique community within CEA that supports early career educators.

A teacher's first years in the classroom are often the most challenging—and a time when educators need all the support their veteran colleagues and peers can give them. Early career educators are so busy learning the ropes and managing multiple new responsibilities that they may not feel as connected to their union or as aware of their rights, responsibilities, and the resources available to them.

O.N.E. Young and Union engages and empowers educators in the first ten years of their career to become successful, active, and visible in their profession and community through collective action.

Reaching Our Newest Educators

Contact christophert@cea.org to join and get access to

Leadership Development O.N.E. Young and Union helps build leadership and career skills that equip members to inspire others, be more confident in their profession, and be a strong voice for their students.

Professional Growth O.N.E. Young and Union gives early career educators access to some of the most sought-after and innovative programs and resources on education law, surviving social media, and workplace rights.

Peer-to-Peer Support O.N.E. Young and Union provides opportunities to connect and support one another through regional events, working with school districts and reaching out to aspiring educators and colleges and universities.

O.N.E. Young and Union has working groups focusing on your interests, including

Political Advocacy Decisions about how and what you teach are often made by people who haven't seen the inside of a classroom in years. We teach you how to advance education policy that impacts your profession and improves public education.

Social Media You're an Instagrammer or TikToker who wants to connect with others and break down the isolation that can come with being a new teacher. We'll show you how.

Education Justice You want to make the world a better place through education. Your union has the resources you need.

Social Events We could all use some release! Connect with other educators at social gatherings, sporting events, and other outings. We help you plan them and pull them off.

CONNECT WITH US ON INSTAGRAM!



CONNECT WITH US ON TIKTOK!



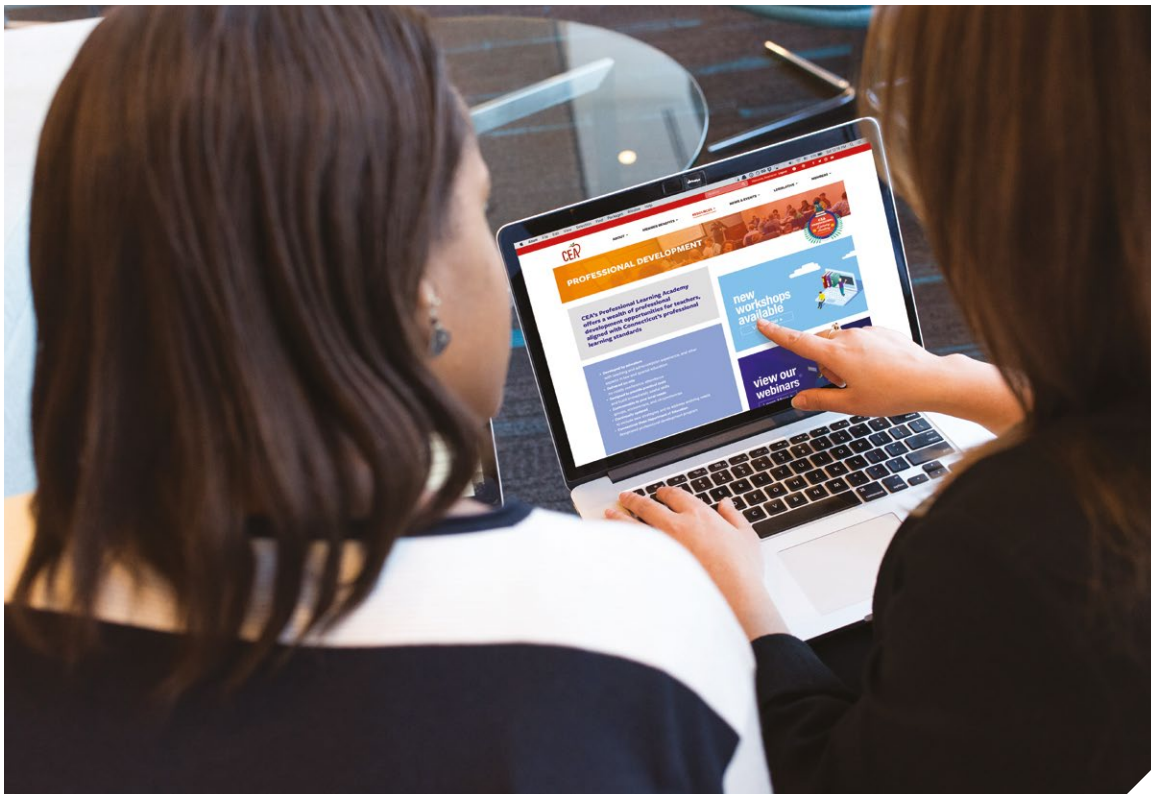
NOT A MEMBER YET? JOIN YOUR UNION?



MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

Membership in CEA provides valuable benefits that protect and support you in your career, enhance your financial security, and save you money. Some of those benefits include

- Strong teams at the local, state, and national levels fighting for better compensation, benefits, and working conditions for you and better outcomes for your students
- 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; when teachers face mistreatment or false accusations of wrongdoing, CEA is on your side with free legal representation that would otherwise cost thousands of dollars
- Legal representation in workers' compensation cases 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
- Established partnerships with vendors and retailers who provide you with savings on a wide variety of goods and services, including car purchases and rentals, travel, fitness, theater tickets, museum admission, adventure parks, skiing, sporting events, clothing, furniture, gifts and accessories, home heating oil, and more. New discounts and special offers are constantly being added. Visit cea.org/discounts.
- \$1 million in liability insurance for on-the-job protection
- Life and property insurance



Establish Positive Relationships with Colleagues

Your relationships with other educators and administrators are important to your success in your first years 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.
- **Get acquainted with your CEA affiliate—your local education association.** Attend your union meetings to help build a professional support system and get to know your contacts—usually your building representative and local president—for questions about your contract and your rights on the job.
- **Ask veteran teachers for their advice.** Be willing to admit you have a lot to learn from experienced teachers.
- **Schedule a meeting with your 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 thoughts and ideas with your colleagues. You are not in this alone—you can help others, and they can help you. Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- **Minimize commitments for non-instructional duties, especially as you begin your teaching career.** It's better to fully understand the time required to meet your teaching responsibilities before you commit to other activities and duties.
- **Communicate with your principal.** Take the initiative to schedule a time when you can meet with your principal and invite your administrator to visit your classroom and provide constructive feedback outside of the formal evaluation process. Listen carefully and respond to suggestions in a professional manner.
- **Say thank you** to those who help and support you, including other teachers, support staff, and administrators.

Build a Team with Support Staff

- **Support staff are a valued part of the instructional team.** A good working relationship between you and your support staff benefits everyone, including your students.
- **Get to know each other.** Schedule time to talk about your backgrounds, goals, and approaches to different situations in the classroom.
- **Clarify expectations.** Talk to support staff about what you want to achieve with your class, providing guidance and allowing for flexibility. Have a clear, open conversation about the tasks you will do and those that will be handled by paraeducators. If you are unsure about certain responsibilities, talk to colleagues about how they work best with their support staff.
- **Communicate.** Touch base with your paraeducators every day if possible, but at least once a week—particularly when it comes to goals for students. Ask for their insights, listen to suggestions, and share positive feedback.
- **Share materials with support staff.** Share copies of lesson plans and any professional development materials you receive. This will help your paraeducator understand the mission and strategies being implemented in the classroom.



Create 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 can often create disruptions that 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 logical consequences with your students. The rules should emphasize mutual respect and consideration for everyone in the classroom—students, teachers, and support staff. If these rules are clear, especially if they are created with students, then students are more likely to respect and follow them. Remember to post rules and to reference them as needed.
 - **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 you care about them, respect them, and think they can succeed. Reach out to their families or guardians with a positive comment to begin establishing 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.” Try to arrange your classroom with that in mind.
- **Structure the time in your class.** Students benefit from a predictable schedule—it provides comfort. Establish and maintain a consistent routine. Prepare students if there will be a known change in this routine.
 - **Maximize student engagement.** Develop lessons that are both cognitively and physically engaging. Provide opportunities for varied forms of participation. Limit lecturing when possible. Engaged students are less likely to exhibit disruptive behaviors.
 - **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 for help in front of the entire class. Others do not know any alternatives to yelling or interrupting. Establish a signal students will use when they need help, such as putting a book on the corner of their desk or using a post-it note as a visual signal at their seat. Let them know they can meet with you briefly after class, or match them with peer role models.
 - **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 students know it is their responsibility to control their behavior.

Members often benefit from additional classroom management training. If your local would like to schedule professional development, email myprofession@cea.org.

- **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.
- **Provide a warning.** If the situation continues, clearly explain to the students

involved the consequences of their actions, then follow through. For serious behavior incidents, record what happened, including the date, who was involved, what you did, and who witnessed the incident—ideally on the day the incident occurred.

- **Remind students of your classroom rules.** Review rules periodically, especially after classroom management issues arise or when returning from school vacations.
- **Be fair.** Be consistent in your discipline methods. Listen to the student’s side of the story.
- **Avoid sarcasm and 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 behavior is serious, potentially violent, or beyond your control, remember:

- **Call for help.** When a conflict is serious, violent, or beyond your control, seek appropriate help and intervention immediately. Know your district’s policy for reporting incidents.
- **Never use force.** Never touch students when disciplining them. Defer to a school administrator to remove a student.
- **Consult with the special education teacher to address disruptive behavior from a student with special needs.**
- **Explore restorative practices.** 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.
- **Ask for assistance.** Ask your mentor, a colleague, or your CEA building representative.

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 or may discourage a teacher from filing a report of the incident. 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.**
- **Request a behavior intervention meeting.** A new state law that CEA advocated for allows any classroom teacher to request a behavior intervention meeting with the school's crisis intervention team for any student whose behavior has
 - caused a serious disruption to the instruction of other students, or
 - caused self-harm, or
 - caused physical harm to a teacher, another student, or a staff member



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 for a list of offerings, and contact your local association president to inquire about scheduling training in your district.

The crisis intervention team must then convene a behavior intervention meeting, and the team must identify resources and supports to address the student's social, emotional, and instructional needs.

If the student who engaged in the aggressive behavior has an individualized education plan (IEP), request a planning and placement team (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. For students who do not have an IEP, a referral for a special education evaluation may be appropriate if their behavior is impeding their ability to learn.

If there is a physical assault or a threat of harm, file a report with your principal. You should include all relevant details and the names of anyone who witnessed the incident. In the case of a report of a physical assault, your principal is required pursuant to CGS Section 10-233g(a) 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 that the local can follow up with the administration.

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 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 that you need to make a claim down the road.

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.



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 for school-related work only.**
- **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.
- **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, on 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.



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.

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 videos 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, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. 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

username 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. Keep in mind that while this might help, it does not guarantee that your posts will be private; a quick search of the social media profiles and contacts belonging to any one of your friends, colleagues, or family members could easily reveal your username. 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 anytime someone wants to tag you in a photo or post.
- **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 profile for school updates. Keep your personal and professional lives separate.
- **Do not post on personal social networking accounts during work hours, and do not use 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.

If you have a question about your district's social media policy or general questions regarding social media usage, contact your UniServ Representative. (Find your UniServ Rep at cea.org/cea-staff.) If your local is interested in social media safety training, email myprofession@cea.org.

- **Be aware that students sometimes target teachers via social networking sites.** Contact your local president or CEA UniServ Representative for assistance if you are the subject of a fake social media profile or other inappropriate activity.



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 you accept or invite as friends or followers 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. Never post anything that could be considered harassing, discriminatory, or malicious.
- 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. Post only information and images you are comfortable with anyone seeing.
- Never send confidential information through social networks.
- Always be skeptical and cautious.
- Respect copyright and other intellectual property laws.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION



Our students live in a diverse society. The challenge is to meet students' diverse educational needs while preparing them to understand and appreciate differences in culture, learning style, interests, and more.

- **Look beyond group stereotypes and treat students as individuals.**
- **Recognize and understand cultural differences.** 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.
- **Celebrate diversity in your teaching.** Students' multicultural perspectives 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.

Help every student thrive

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.
- **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.** Consider co-teaching, collaborative partnerships, or concurrent small group instruction with other staff, including special education teachers and teachers of English learners.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Special education teachers have important responsibilities in addition to instructing 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. It is important that you complete all documentation within the required timelines; there are consequences for failing to do so. Get organized and take advantage of any support your school can provide.

- **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.
- **Keep up with the required paperwork.** If you find yourself falling behind, reach out immediately to trusted colleagues for advice and help. 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 the special education coordinator and ask for supports to get your work done. It is your responsibility, however, to get the work done.

Would you or your colleagues benefit from a presentation on special education law and regulations? If so, ask your local president to email myprofession@cea.org and schedule a workshop in your school or district with CEA Special Education Issues Specialist Robyn Kaplan-Cho.

- **Come prepared to discuss any issues of concern when you attend PPT and 504 meetings.** In the Indirect Services sections of the IEP or 504 plan, you have the right to request assistance/supports. Examples of supports you can request include training, collaboration time with other staff, and paraprofessional support or a one-to-one aide. Also, you should know that you are encouraged to speak honestly and openly at PPT and 504 meetings without fear of reprisal, and the law protects you from retaliation for any recommendations you make during these meetings.

Check out these resources

Connecticut Department of Education Bureau of Special Education
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

National Education Association Special Education and IDEA Resources
nea.org/specialed

National Association for Gifted Children
nagc.org

Council for Exceptional Children
cec.sped.org

Education World
educationworld.com/special_ed

CEA Special Education Resources
cea.org/special-education



PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents can be your best allies.

When parents and 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.
- **Share positive feedback about students.** One idea that works well is to note when students do a good deed 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, talk with your principal). 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. Overly burdened parents may interact less with you and your school but need you as an ally even more.

TEAM UP WITH PARENTS

Encourage parents to

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

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. 5).** Parents will appreciate knowing that you have rules and expectations 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.** Take some time to think about how best to answer; every communication is an opportunity. Thank parents for reaching out to you and acknowledge their concerns. Remain kind and confident, offer opportunities to continue the conversation, and always document calls to students' homes, including times 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 parents express their feelings, note the issues that are being aired, and ask questions that show you are listening to and acknowledging their point of view. Once they are feeling calm, 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.
- **Keep the focus on the future.** Identify 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 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.

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. Offering virtual conferences can be helpful to those who cannot attend in person. 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 parents or family members 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. Consider creating a reference sheet to be shared at the conference for each student, containing information such as the student's strengths, areas in need of improvement, and ways that parents and guardians can support their child at home.
- **Bridge communication gaps.** Arrange for an interpreter for parents who are deaf or 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.



TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL TEACHER EVALUATION

Having a successful evaluation involves knowing your rights and responsibilities as well as how to prepare for observations and conferences with your evaluator. CEA's Teacher Evaluation Made Simple (cea.org/new-teacher-resources) is an essential, detailed guide with important tips for navigating the teacher evaluation process and securing a positive outcome. Below are simple steps to a successful performance evaluation.

New TEVAL Guidelines

New teacher evaluation guidelines were approved by the Connecticut State Board of Education in June 2023 and will be implemented in 2024-2025. The state legislature also voted to eliminate the performance rating requirement for teachers. School districts will have 2023-2024 to rewrite their evaluation plan to align with new guidelines and statutory requirements. To learn more about the new guidelines and how they are likely to impact you, check out teacher evaluation resources at cea.org.

While school districts overhaul their evaluation plans, they can continue to use their old plan or decide to extend the existing evaluation flexibilities. If your district adopts the flexibilities in 2023-2024, it could lessen some of the requirements listed in your evaluation plan, such as the number and type of observations required of beginning teachers.

- **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. In June 2023, the state legislature voted to eliminate the rating requirement for teachers, but this will not go into effect until 2024-2025, when the new guidelines are implemented. Until then, teachers will still receive a rating, although if your district adopted the flexibilities, the rating may be holistic rather than mathematically calculated.
- **Know the timeline.** Review your district's plan and all deadlines. Record the deadlines in your calendar.
- **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, you may have fewer observations and conferences.
- **Your student learning goals and the indicators of academic growth and development (IAGDs) must be mutually agreed upon by you and your evaluator.** If the flexibilities are adopted in your district, 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, or adjustments to goals, you can request dispute resolution.** Speak to your local association president or CEA UniServ Rep about this option. With assistance from your CEA UniServ Rep, 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

CEA IS HERE FOR YOU

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

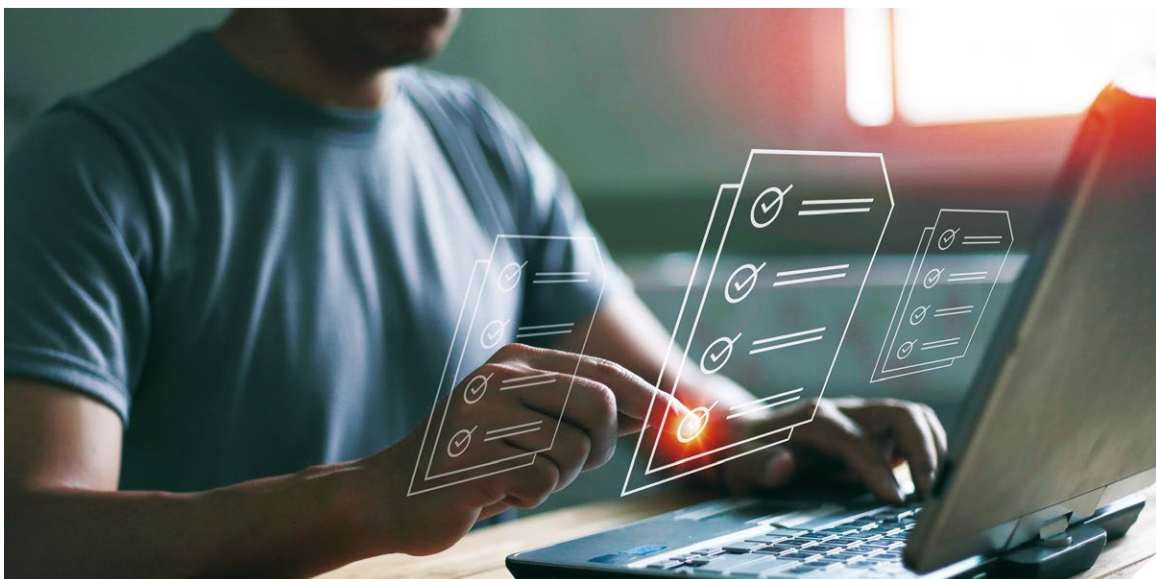
up appointments, and be timely with your paperwork. Consider inviting your evaluator in for an observation when you have something creative and exciting to share. Ask your evaluator for advice and guidance when appropriate and advocate respectfully for yourself when necessary.

- **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. Consider adding 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 formative feedback on what you are doing well and what needs improvement before your evaluator observes you.
- **Do not hesitate to ask for help when you need it.** Observe colleagues and borrow strategies and routines that might work well in your classroom. Your colleagues are often the best source of ideas and support. CEA is also there to help you if you need assistance with an evaluation problem.
- **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 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 members of your Professional Development and Evaluation Committee (PDEC).** Every school district must have a Professional Development and Evaluation Committee (PDEC) that includes teacher representatives of your collective bargaining unit. District PDECs are charged with annually revising their evaluation plan and drafting the professional development plan. This task is especially important this year since your district's entire evaluation plan will need to be rewritten. Be sure to know who the teacher representatives on your PDEC are. If there are aspects of the evaluation process that are overly burdensome or are not being followed, 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 and know what to expect ahead of time.

See CEA's guide [Teacher Evaluation Made Simple \(cea.org/new-teacher-resources\)](https://cea.org/new-teacher-resources) for a more comprehensive compendium of tips and essential information.



SCHOOL SAFETY

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.
- **Foster a safe and respectful environment in your classroom and school.** Know your school district's policies on bullying and intimidation. 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 schoolwide anti-bullying and safety programs.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF A STUDENT IS INJURED UNDER MY SUPERVISION?



1. Seek medical attention from the school nurse or administrator and call 911 immediately if the severity of the injury 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). 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.



Feeling overwhelmed? You are not alone—hang in there!

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.
- **Keep up with paperwork.** 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 grade only the portion that contains the skills 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.
- **Avoid procrastinating.** Having something hanging over you can cause more tension than the project is worth.
- **Try to leave your teaching at school.** Set boundaries between your work life and personal life.
- **Get plenty of sleep.** Do not bring your computer or mobile device into your bedroom; blue light can affect sleeping patterns. Instead, read, write in a journal, or practice gentle yoga or mindfulness 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 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 will make mistakes. Forgive yourself—you're human!

If you are feeling overwhelmed, reach out to your local association president or UniServ Rep and request contact information for your employee assistance program, which provides free, confidential counseling.

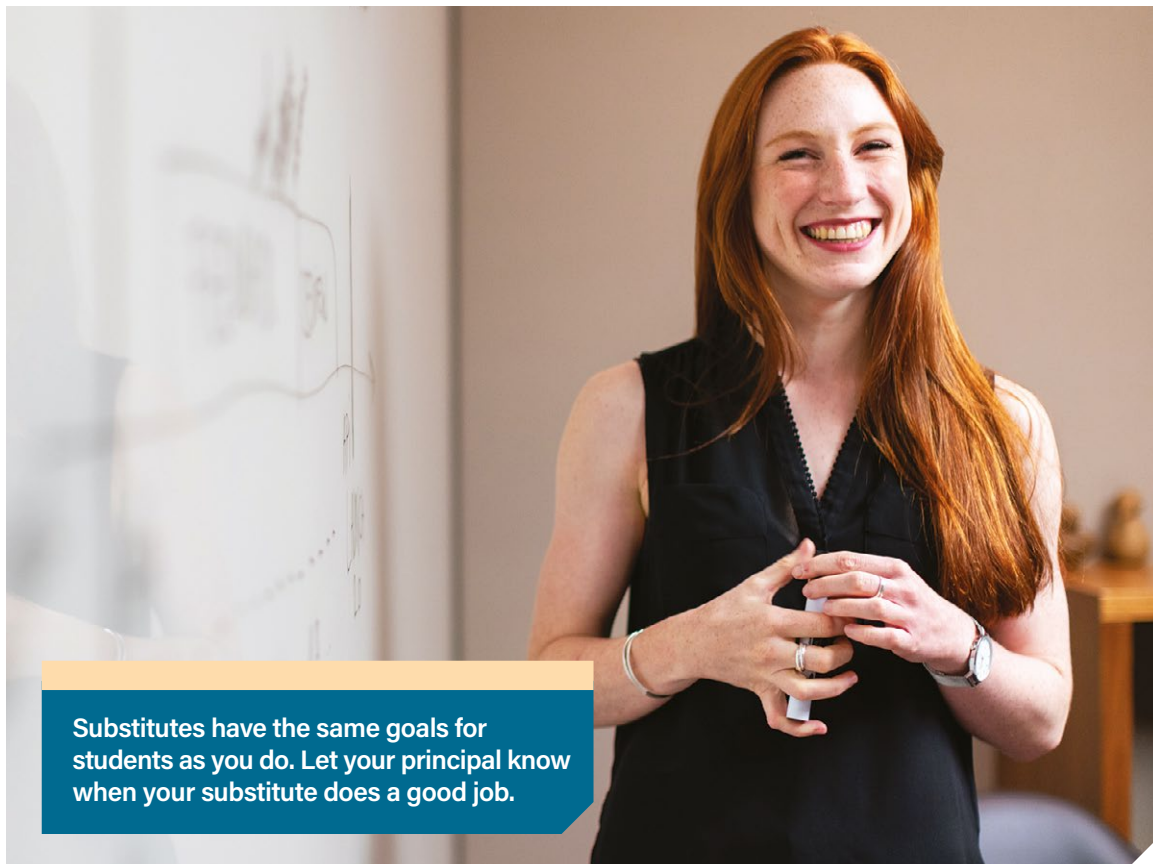
SUBSTITUTES

Help Your Substitute Succeed

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 lists**, 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
- **Procedures including housekeeping tasks**, opening activities, absentee reporting, lunch count, and bathroom procedures
- **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 cannot pay the full fee 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 for information about certification requirements and the continuum.
- 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 address, you should send them a notification for their files. The best way to make sure the SDE has your current contact information is to create a certification account. Visit sdeportal.ct.gov/cecscreateuser and be sure to use your personal email when setting up your account. You can also update your information by emailing teacher.cert@ct.gov.

For questions about certification, visit portal.ct.gov/SDE/Certification/Bureau-of-Certification/FAQ.

To speak to an SDE certification officer, call 860-713-6969. The hotline is staffed Monday and Thursday from 12 to 2 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.

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION INQUIRIES

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 Elizabeth Sked at elizabeths@cea.org or 860-725-6331.

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, their 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. Do not discuss students with colleagues where you might be overheard, for example, in the hallway, main office, or lunchroom.
- **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 or remove all identifying information.
- **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 it is not protected.** When in doubt, withhold the requested information until you check with your principal about 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 you cannot discuss private student data unless your supervisor allows it and it 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 up on 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.

Some factors that may lead to a report of suspected abuse or neglect include:

- A child with 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 habitually late or absent child
- A child who arrives early and leaves late because he or she is reluctant to go home

For more about mandated reporting, visit portal.ct.gov/DCF/1-DCF/Reporting-Child-Abuse-and-Neglect.

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

Every year, many teachers are accused of inappropriately touching students. Even when 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 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 contact 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.
- **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 photographed or recorded.** Smartphones mean you never know when you may be "caught on camera."

Would your colleagues benefit from becoming more familiar with Connecticut laws impacting teachers and students? Ask your local president to schedule CEA's Teachers and the Law workshop, free and open to CEA members.

Professional Records

Keeping up-to-date personal and professional records in a safe location that's easily accessible to you 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 superintendent's office. You should review your file annually to be sure you know what is in it. Keep copies of any disciplinary items.



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.

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, ask about the purpose of the meeting. You have the right to have a union representative present at a meeting called by the administration if you think discipline or other adverse job consequences might result from the meeting.
- **Seek help.** If you reasonably believe a meeting could result in disciplinary action, contact your building representative, local president, or UniServ Rep 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.
- **Stop any conference or meeting that turns into an investigation of alleged wrongdoing.** If you attend a conference that begins on a positive note but deteriorates into questions about wrongdoing and possible discipline or other adverse job consequences, ask to stop the conference until you can obtain union advice and representation. Your

local association president or UniServ Representative can advise you as to your rights and any 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 invoke your Weingarten rights.** Tell your administrator, "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 be present at this meeting."

ACCUSED OF A SERIOUS WORK-RELATED OFFENSE?

If you are ever accused of a serious offense, contact your CEA 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 for a list of UniServ Reps and their corresponding districts.



TEACHER CONTRACTS, TENURE, AND DISMISSAL

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.



What are my rights as a tenured teacher regarding dismissal?

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

- Inefficiency, incompetence, or ineffectiveness based on evaluations that comply with State Board of Education guidelines for evaluations
- Insubordination against reasonable board of education rules
- Moral misconduct
- Disability proven by medical evidence
- Elimination of the position to which they were 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
- Other due and sufficient cause

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.

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.



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?

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 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 the grievance process.

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.)

Connecticut General Statute (CGS) 10-151 provides more specifics on tenure, as does the State Department of Education website:

portal.ct.gov/sde.

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. Keep a copy of your contract and collective bargaining agreement. If anything in your contract is incorrect, contact your local association president or building representative for assistance.

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 classroom, students, and community. Visit cea.org and nea.org to learn the latest about school funding, federal education laws, and policy developments at the state and local level. Talk with your colleagues, participate in union meetings, and get involved in movements to effect positive, meaningful 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. Register to vote or make changes to your name, address, or party affiliation at cea.org/vote.
- **Learn about elections in Connecticut.** The Connecticut Secretary of State election page, portal.ct.gov/SOTS, has information about upcoming elections.

- **Know the issues and the candidates.** Visit cea.org/news-and-info to learn about issues that impact Connecticut schools and communities and nea.org/home/IssuesAndAction.html to learn about national concerns and initiatives that impact schools and communities. At cea.org/district-comparison, compare candidates running for state office in your district and see where they stand on our issues. 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).
- **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 and educators. 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 to 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.
- **Donate to education-friendly candidates.** The NEA Fund for Public Education is the political action committee of the National Education Association used to support candidates who stand behind our public schools. Visit educationvotes.nea.org/donate to learn more about what the NEA Fund does and how to contribute.



Help with Student Debt

Depending upon the type of federal student loan you carry, you may be eligible for some loan 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 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
- **Debt Repayment Estimator Calculator:** studentloans.gov/myDirectLoan/mobile/repayment/repaymentEstimator.action
- **Teacher Loan Forgiveness and Teacher Loan Cancellation:** studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation
- **Public Service Loan Forgiveness:** studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service

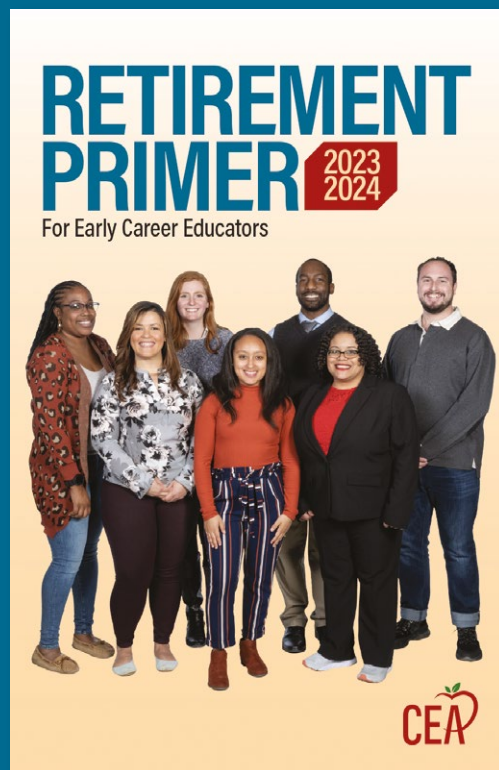
CEA Member Benefits partner Cambridge Credit Counseling offers free webinars and counseling sessions to every CEA member looking to qualify for Public Service Loan Forgiveness, take advantage of income-driven repayment, and more. For webinar dates and times, visit cea.org or contact Cambridge student loan counseling manager Todd Friedhaber (tfriedhaber@cambridgecredit.org, 800-757-1788, ext. 5373) or director of education Marty Lynch (mlynch@cambridgecredit.org).

PLANNING FOR RETIREMENT

Someday, you will consider retirement. In an effort to familiarize you with the basics of your retirement system, CEA has produced a guide focused on issues of particular importance to teachers just entering the state retirement system as well as others who may be years away from retiring.

Through this publication and related workshops, CEA hopes to make you more knowledgeable about the pension benefits to which you will be entitled as well as steps 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.

Visit cea.org/new-teacher-resources.





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