



# *your first classroom*

ATPE'S GUIDE FOR NEW TEACHERS





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Preparing for the TExES exam can be a stressful, time consuming experience. Finding preparation material is difficult because the study books are loaded with outdated, overwhelming information and every website seems to be a one-size fits all testing strategies booklet. As experienced educators, we at 240Tutoring know the hardships in preparing for the TExES exam. We understand the pressure of having an entire career decided by one exam and the trials of preparation. To help teachers prepare for their TExES test, we decided to create a quality, reputable source for TExES preparation.

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### **Assess**

Take a basic assessment over the material.

### **Study**

Using the assessment information, start studying at your weakest point.

### **Repeat**

Assess yourself up to 3 times to chart your progress and ensure effective studying.

## **Pass the test!**



# Welcome to your first classroom

The first year of teaching is a challenging experience. This guide will provide you with insight and tips for your first day of class and beyond. ATPE will provide you with ongoing support like this throughout your career. As professionals, our members are committed to supporting quality public education and the professional rights and obligations of the education community. ATPE is a member-owned, member-governed professional association. With more than 116,000 members, ATPE is the leading educators' association in the state and the largest independent association for public school educators in the nation.

## ATPE is Supporting Your Freedom to Teach<sup>SM</sup>

You want to make a difference in your students' lives. ATPE wants nothing to stand in your way. That's why we provide the protection, advocacy and resources that free educators from many of their day-to-day worries and help them focus on their students.

Eligible ATPE members:

- Receive liability insurance,\* employment rights defense\* and assistance from full-time staff attorneys.\*\*
- Are confident that their views and concerns on education issues will be represented by the dedicated ATPE lobby team, which has an effective voice at the state Capitol, with state agencies and in Washington, D.C.
- Have access to quality publications, online tools and professional development, and useful services and discounts.

Visit [atpe.org](http://atpe.org) for more details.

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\*\*The insured member services and staff attorneys' assistance are offered through separate programs.

# A message from your ATPE University Program Coordinator



Congratulations on your decision to become a classroom teacher. This is the beginning of a new chapter in your life, and you've worked hard to get here. There is much to consider and prepare for as you embark on your new career—educating the schoolchildren of Texas.

Regardless of your level of preparation or experience, the first year in the classroom can be daunting, so it never hurts to have somewhere to turn for advice. That's why we've created *Your*

*First Classroom*. In it, you'll find helpful advice on job searching, tips on how to get organized before your first day, ideas on what to say when contacting parents and important information about the Educators' Code of Ethics.

We've also included information about ATPE, Texas' premier professional educators' association. You may wonder why belonging to a professional association is so important. There are many variables to consider when you're interacting day-to-day with your employer, school children and their parents. As an ATPE member, you'll have access to essential protection, political advocacy and ongoing resources, including free online mentoring to help you navigate through potential problems. You'll also become a part of the largest team of educators in the state. We're all working together to better public education. In addition to the information provided here, I encourage you to check out the great resources and information on our website at [atpe.org](http://atpe.org). I wish you all the best in your new career.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Lanfer". The script is fluid and cursive.

Kathy Lanfer  
ATPE Field Representative and University Program Coordinator

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# Finding your dream job

Most Texas school districts interview candidates for teaching positions during the late spring and summer. School districts will often offer potential employees substitute teaching assignments before full-time positions are available. (If you are hired to substitute, you must join ATPE as an associate member in order to be eligible for insured benefits.\* If you're later hired as a full-time teacher, you'll need to change your membership to the first-time professional category, which includes professional liability insurance.) Call the district's personnel or superintendent's office to find out about open positions. You might also want to bookmark districts' websites; most will have a special section devoted to job openings.

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## WEB WATCH

A number of regional education service centers (ESCs) and private vendors also maintain Internet job banks. Visit [www.tea.state.tx.us/ESC](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/ESC) for a map of all ESCs in Texas.

Other online job banks:

- [www.monster.com](http://www.monster.com)
- [www.educationamerica.net](http://www.educationamerica.net)
- [www.educationjobs.com](http://www.educationjobs.com)
- Texas Association of School Administrators' Career Center: [www.tasanet.org](http://www.tasanet.org)



## Before submitting your résumé or application

With social networking sites and Internet use so prevalent in today's society, it's important to be aware of your online presence and to keep it professional; potential employers might look at your online presence when considering you for a position. Keep these tips in mind:

- Keep your email address professional. Prospective employers will not be impressed if you send communications to them with email addresses such as *partygirl@gmail.com* or *beerdrinker@yahoo.com*. A first initial and last name is much more professional.
- Google yourself to see what type of information a potential employer might run across on the Internet. If you find something that might be viewed as inappropriate, contact the webmaster of the site and ask that the information be removed.
- If you are a member of a social media website, make sure that the information on your page is professional, and use the site's privacy settings to ensure only certain viewers can access your profile.
- Join a professional networking group such as LinkedIn, which is a way to share your professional accomplishments and goals with the online world.



## The interview

Keep these tips in mind as you interview:

- Make eye contact.
- Exhibit professionalism in your behavior, speech and dress.
- Show enthusiasm, both for the job and for the education profession in general.
- Demonstrate how your education and work background apply to the position.
- Express an understanding of the relationships between instruction and learning, assessment tests and teacher performance appraisals.
- Know the school district's goals, and reinforce your support for them.
- Be supportive of your potential campus, district, grade-level team, subject-area department and diverse student groups.
- Show characteristics of a disciplined classroom leader by providing sample lesson plans, a TEKS objectives folder and rules for classroom behavior.

### WEB WATCH

For additional tips on pre-employment planning and interviewing:

- Check out the Resources section at [atpe.org](http://atpe.org).
- Look up salary data for a particular ZIP code at [www.salary.com](http://www.salary.com).
- Get general career and résumé advice at [www.job.com](http://www.job.com).
- Perfect your résumé using the helpful dos and don'ts found at [www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org).
- Find advice on getting hired and starting your career at [www.educationworld.com/jobs](http://www.educationworld.com/jobs).
- Read about the qualities principals seek in job candidates and their advice for job seekers and new teachers at [www.educationworld.com/a\\_admin/admin/admin222.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin222.shtml).
- Get insight on everything from letters of recommendation to principals' ideal job candidates at [www.teacher.scholastic.com](http://www.teacher.scholastic.com).





# Before opening day

## Read the Texas Educators' Code of Ethics

As a new educator, it's important to be aware of the professional ethical standards you are expected to uphold during the course of your career. As authorized by the Texas Legislature, the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) developed two complementary bodies of rules: the Educators' Code of Ethics and its own disciplinary rules, which contain enforceable standards for which an educator may be sanctioned. The rules require that educators maintain the highest level of integrity in both their professional lives and their public personal lives. The following is not a complete list of prohibited conduct and is provided only for guidance. A link to the entire code can be found on the TEA website at [www.tea.state.tx.us](http://www.tea.state.tx.us). In addition, read the chapter on professional responsibilities beginning on page 22 of this guide.

According to the Educators' Code of Ethics, an educator may not:

- Falsify records or recklessly, intentionally or knowingly engage in deceptive practices regarding a district's official policies.
- Knowingly misappropriate monies or property or submit fraudulent requests for payment.
- Use professional privileges for personal advantage.
- Make threats of violence.
- Abandon an educator's employment contract without good cause.
- Engage in criminal actions or other violations of law.
- Refuse to cooperate with a TEA investigation.
- Consume alcohol at school events when students are present.
- Intentionally or knowingly misrepresent past employment or criminal history or a disciplinary record when applying for employment.

## Get to know your colleagues

Introduce yourself to educators on your campus to begin building relationships with colleagues who are willing to discuss strategies and challenges. A mentor can ease your transition from student to teacher. Take advantage of any orientation program the district or campus sponsors to support teachers during their first years in the classroom. Your outreach should include getting to know a fellow teacher, your grade-level or subject-area coordinator, a curriculum specialist, your assigned mentor, the campus principal, the secretaries and other office staff members, the custodians, and any para-educators with whom you might work.

### WEB WATCH

To supplement your district mentoring program, sign up for the ATPE/PACT System at [www.atpe.org/resources/PACT](http://www.atpe.org/resources/PACT). You'll be able to ask experienced e-mentors questions, participate in message boards and chat rooms, and access many teacher resources and tools.



## Align your teaching goals with campus performance objectives

In recent years, the TEKS and student assessment tests have been integrated into campus performance objectives and lesson plans. It's likely that your campus has a curriculum guide to help you meet performance objectives.

Meet with the grade-level or subject-area coordinators to chart a sequence of lesson plans that correlates with the TEKS and reinforces campus performance goals. You might want to consult additional resources, such as curriculum guides, textbooks, library books, study guides and lesson plan websites.

Obtain and review curriculum guides and textbooks, especially the teacher editions, for each subject you will teach. Ensure that you have plenty of resource materials for the topics you'll be covering in class.

Some districts have lesson plan requirements or templates that must be followed.

### WEB WATCH

Find more information about the TEKS and state assessment tests at [www.tea.state.tx.us](http://www.tea.state.tx.us).



## Familiarize yourself with policies

Be sure to read the district's employee handbook and know policies concerning:

- Student and faculty arrival and dismissal times.
- Student attendance.
- Meetings with students.
- Illness, injury and medication.
- Fire and other emergency drills.
- Elementary school lunch counts (if applicable).
- District discipline policy.
- Required classroom discipline plans (if applicable).
- Contact with parents.
- Phone and Internet use.
- Grading and reporting.
- Textbook assignment.
- Use of school audiovisual equipment.
- Professional development.

## Prepare a letter to send home with students

Write an introductory letter to parents that includes the school phone number and your extension, your e-mail address and your parent-teacher conference hours. Include your grading procedures—this is often district-mandated—and/or a percentage breakdown by area (e.g., attendance counts for 40 percent, in-class participation counts for 30 percent, etc.) and a list of materials that each student needs for each class or content area.

## Gather classroom supplies

Collect supplies you want to keep in your classroom, such as tissues, safety pins, decorating materials, hand sanitizer and extra pens or pencils. Check with fellow teachers and the office staff to learn what materials are already available at the school.

## Establish procedures

Decide how you will handle the beginning and end of each class period or content area, the distribution and collection of instructional materials, cleanup of work areas, guidelines for student use of classroom computers and other technology, safety routines, and homework assignments. Expect these routines to take a little longer at the beginning of the year as you and your students adjust.

## Create a functional and comfortable learning environment

Depending on the instruction and activities you have planned and administrators' expectations:

- Determine if you want to use a round-table or lecture-oriented seating arrangement.
- Arrange desks and other furniture so that all students can comfortably see whiteboards, overhead screens and maps.
- Make room for learning centers (such as activity areas or reading nooks).
- Select a low-traffic area for storage of materials and student belongings.
- Know where your school's audiovisual equipment is stored and whom to contact when you need to use something. Remember to check your room for electrical outlets; their locations may determine the arrangement of instructional equipment.

## Spice up your bulletin boards

Bulletin boards provide visual stimulation and information and add an element of artistic flair to your often plain white classroom walls. Plan thematic bulletin boards. Seasonal, cultural or historical themes are appropriate for weeks at a time. Try using fabric or wrapping paper as a background. Create bulletin boards with student success messages or inspirational quotes that promote classroom pride and motivation. Some schools might have supplies that you can use to decorate. Interactive bulletin boards are a great way to get parents and students involved in the curriculum and reinforce learning that has occurred.

For more tips on preparing for the start of your new career, visit [www.inspiringteachers.com](http://www.inspiringteachers.com), which offers tools for new teachers.



## ATPE Book of the Month Club

Take advantage of the ATPE Book of the Month Club to encourage your students to get more out of their reading. Books are chosen from lists compiled by the Texas Library Association and ATPE provides questions you can use with students for reflection and discussion. Participants receive a certificate of completion for their efforts!

Learn more about this and the Guest Reader program at [www.atpe.org /Resources/Educators/bookClub.asp](http://www.atpe.org/Resources/Educators/bookClub.asp).



# Preparing for your first day

## Classroom preparation

- Seating chart
- Audiovisual equipment
- Bulletin boards

## Instructional materials

- Curriculum guides
- Lesson plans and grade book
- Student textbooks and teacher editions
- Technology tools

## Management preparations

- Name, desk and bus tags (if applicable)
- Attendance forms
- Campus/district discipline policy
- Student background information
- Letter to parents

## Planning for instruction

- A list of first-day activities
- Class rules and procedures
- Supplies
- Lunch count and meal tickets (if applicable)
- Cafeteria and library procedures (if applicable)
- Fire drill procedures
- Emergency lockdown drill procedures
- Arrival and dismissal practices
- A prepared *Survival Guide for Your Substitute* (just in case), which you can order by contacting ATPE Member Services at (800) 777-ATPE or [member\\_services@atpe.org](mailto:member_services@atpe.org).

# Getting through your first day

## When the bell rings

Be in your classroom before the students arrive, and welcome them with a smile. Once everyone has arrived, introduce yourself and write your name on the board so students can learn to spell and pronounce it. If you teach at the secondary level, also write the course name on the board so students know they've found the right classroom. Share a little information about yourself so students can get acquainted with you.

## Down to business

- Show elementary school students where to put their lunches, backpacks, etc., so they will know what to do with them the next morning.
- Familiarize students with special areas.
- Explain grading procedures, course requirements and classroom rules as well as the consequences of breaking those rules.
- Distribute labeled homework folders, which provide an organized way for students to carry work between school and home.
- Assign elementary students an activity they can take home the first day.
- Ask secondary students to list information you may need on a note card. Suggest they include e-mail addresses, home and cell phone numbers, parents' names and work numbers, and a line or two about their own hobbies or interests.

## Before the last bell rings

Show elementary school students where they should wait for class the following morning. Distribute and explain materials that need to be completed by parents. Explain your campus dismissal procedures for students who ride the bus, get rides or walk home. And remember: End the day on a positive note.

# Setting performance expectations

Define expectations for students' academic performance and behavior during the first few days of class. Make sure your expectations are attainable and reasonable. The best teachers practice what they preach.

## **Be clear and firm**

Make sure everyone understands the classroom rules and the consequences of breaking them. Do not ignore infractions, especially during the first few weeks of school.

## **Be understanding**

School should be an engaging and positive place for students. Make work assignments relevant to your students, and balance challenging assignments with fun activities that are also academically stimulating. Students need exercise, breaks and social stimulation, so plan activities accordingly.

## **Be positive**

Tell your students what they need to do to succeed in your classroom, and do your part to ensure their success. Remember to lead by example.

## **Be enthusiastic**

Enthusiasm is contagious! If you're not excited about your lesson plans or the process of learning, then your students won't be, either.

## **Be encouraging**

Nurture your students' self-confidence and pride in their schoolwork by routinely rewarding them for excellent work, attendance and behavior. Try to recognize every student over the course of the year.



# Effective instructional management

Get a grip on classroom discipline from the very beginning by reinforcing positive behavior and addressing rule infractions.

## Prevent off-task or disruptive behavior

- Maintain lesson momentum.
- Offer challenging experiences.
- Avoid situations that put students in long lines or make them wait for the next activity.
- Before the beginning of each class, write instructions or objectives for assignments, questions to ponder or curriculum-related puzzles on the board.
- Continuously monitor the classroom, and teach students how to pay attention, follow directions and ask for help.

## Establishing classroom rules

A great way to get your students involved in following classroom rules is to have them be part of the rule-making process. As a large group, ask students to come up with their top five rules. Visibly display them in the classroom, and revisit them often.

## Make classroom rules stick

- Make sure rules center around respect and cooperation.
- State rules positively, and allow for student discussion and clarification.
- Present rules orally, post them in your classroom, and send a copy of them home for parents to review and return with a signature.
- Remind students of expected behavior by enforcing consequences and rewarding successes.
- Always praise and reward cooperation and time spent on task.

- Avoid using writing assignments as punishment because doing so might cause students to equate writing with punishment.
- Review campus and district discipline management plans with your campus administrator or mentor teacher, and consult with either for guidance throughout the year.
- Because some students respond emotionally if they fail at their schoolwork, build self-esteem by giving students opportunities to succeed and steadily increasing the difficulty of assignments.
- Avoid taking away recess or other opportunities for physical activity as a consequence for rule breaking. Physical activity has been proven to stimulate learning and serves as an outlet for students to expend extra energy.

Most of all, remember to keep a good sense of humor. Admit it when you make a mistake, and be able to laugh at yourself!



# Timesavers

## Plan every day

Take a few minutes each morning to review the day's or week's events and get organized. Make a list of projects to be completed, then prioritize and complete each project in order.

## Delegate tasks

To keep you focused on teaching, ask fellow teachers about support resources available to you. Check with your principal or other supervisors as well. Volunteers or students might be able to operate the copy machine, plan club meeting agendas, update bulletin boards, feed classroom pets, take attendance, take lunch counts, pass out snacks or notes, and tidy up the classroom.

## Develop a personal record-keeping system

Keep a journal to reflect on the day's events, evaluate your performance and log your comments to detect and solve problems. Keeping detailed records might also help you recognize student successes that might otherwise be overlooked.

## Keep a professional development record

Your professional development folder should include your professional certification; university diplomas and transcripts; your employment contract and notice(s) of assignment; honors, commendations and awards; record of all professional development activities; appraisal records; and other employment- and certification-related documentation.

Most school districts, professional associations and regional education service centers provide opportunities for continuing professional education (CPE) credit.

### WEB WATCH

Learn about professional development opportunities and take free online CPE courses at [www.atpe.org/Resources](http://www.atpe.org/Resources). Take advantage of the Texas Education Agency's Project Share website, where educators can collaborate and access professional development. [www.projectsharetexas.org](http://www.projectsharetexas.org).



# Communication between school and home

When students see their parents and teachers working together, their attitudes and motivation improve.

- A note of introduction sent to each parent at the beginning of the year opens the lines of communication. Invite parents to share goals for their children, and ask parents to develop ideas for increasing both their own and their children's involvement in the classroom.
- Send monthly correspondence to your students' parents. Include a calendar with goals, the plans for each week and the topics to be studied. Provide parents with ideas for at-home activities that will complement schoolwork.
- Find opportunities for parental involvement that match parents' experiences, interests, skills and the amount of time they are willing to volunteer.
- Try to contact parents with positive notes as soon as you can. That way, if a problem develops, your first contact won't be negative.
- Regularly provide parents with samples of their children's work. Let parents know how their children are succeeding and how they can improve.
- Be positive when speaking with parents. When you mention areas their child could work on, also praise the student for something he is doing well.
- Make sure parents are familiar with the district's discipline policy and campus rules.
- When you're faced with a classroom discipline problem, promptly notify parents, and work with them toward a solution.
- When you send test scores home, explain how they should be interpreted.
- If you don't speak Spanish and need to contact parents who do, ask a Spanish-speaking teacher or aide to help you translate messages. Do the same for other languages.
- Keep records of all contacts you have with parents, including copies of e-mails or notes you make during conferences.
- Join your school's PTA or PTO, and stay active.

## Holding conferences at school

- If you anticipate a difficult conference, try to include an administrator or another teacher from your team. A third party can help keep the meeting on track and clarify the information discussed. Team conferences can benefit all parties involved.
- Give parents a conference agenda ahead of time so they know what will be discussed and how long it will take.
- Avoid physical barriers, such as sitting behind a desk.
- Keep an open mind and listen to everything the parents say (both verbally and non-verbally; body language often shows how a person truly feels) before you comment.
- Avoid becoming defensive if parents question your judgment.
- Communicate clearly that you understand the parents' concerns.
- Professionals are held accountable for every word they speak, so if you find that you are not able to conduct yourself professionally, you should adjourn and reschedule the session for a later date.
- Document the events of the conference.
- After the conference, follow up with parents on your conversation, especially if you sense they were uneasy with something you discussed.

## Holding conferences by phone

The following is a sample dialogue to assist you with parent calls:

- "Hello, Mr. or Ms. \_\_\_\_\_. This is \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm calling to introduce myself and to make sure you feel free to call me if you have any concerns. How does \_\_\_\_\_ feel about school?"
- "I'm calling parents to ask how their children feel about school. Has \_\_\_\_\_ mentioned anything to you?"
- "I thought perhaps we could share some information about \_\_\_\_\_ that would make her more comfortable at school."

Sample closing lines:

- "You've been really helpful in letting me know about \_\_\_\_\_."
- "I'm really pleased I had an opportunity to talk with you over the phone, and I look forward to meeting you in person soon."

Sample lines for setting up future conferences:

- "I really would appreciate your dropping in and talking further."
- "Is there a time you could come in, or would you like me to call you?"



# Preparing for a substitute

- Early in the school year, designate one or two responsible students to help substitutes locate materials and answer any procedural questions substitutes might have.
- Remind students of their responsibility to cooperate and conduct themselves properly during your absence.
- Warn them of the consequences of a bad report from a substitute.
- Make students aware of any special arrangements you have made to assist the substitute.
- Use the *Survival Guide for Your Substitute*, a free promotional item from ATPE in which you can list important classroom numbers, phone extensions, room locations and more.
- Gather the following materials:
  - A welcome note with names of helpful teachers and students.
  - A student roster with special dietary or health information.
  - A seating chart.
  - Your classroom behavior expectations.
  - A daily schedule that includes the names of students who leave the room for activities and specialized instruction.
  - Current lesson plans with detailed instructions.
  - Sample absentee slips.
  - Emergency procedures and a school map photocopied from the campus handbook.
  - Extra assignments for students who finish early.
  - Instructions for using the classroom computer and other technology (if applicable).

# Professional responsibilities

To prevent possible legal issues during your career, it is suggested you follow these guidelines. It's also important to join a professional association, such as ATPE, that offers assistance with a wide range of employment related legal matters including appraisals, contract issues and certification.

## **Responsibilities related to your school district, administrator and colleagues:**

- Learn your rights and obligations to your employer by reading your contract, your teacher handbook and related memos.
- Follow the chain of command when seeking information.
- Follow all legal directives, even if you disagree with them.
- Ensure you are using approved discipline management techniques before asking for administrator involvement.
- Know your district's policies on communicating with students through social media, e-mail and phone texting.
- Keep your online presence professional, and monitor it regularly.
- Respect the privacy of your colleagues by not discussing personnel matters with others or revealing confidential information to anyone except the appropriate administrator.
- Avoid knowingly making false statements about colleagues.
- Maintain a professional demeanor with your administrator and colleagues.
- Attempt to resolve conflicts amiably before taking serious concerns to your supervisor.



## Responsibilities related to your students:

- Respect your students' privacy. Avoid discussion about students with others except for educationally relevant purposes.
- Avoid physical contact with students inside or outside of the classroom.
- Avoid engaging in written or electronic communications that could be construed as inappropriate, and refrain from socializing with a student.
- Ensure you implement relevant portions of all students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and behavioral management plans (if applicable). Seek counselor assistance if necessary.
- Thoroughly read and make sure you understand standardized test administration rules before giving the test.
- Report suspected child abuse within 48 hours to the Texas Department of Family Protective Services at (800) 252-5400.
- Avoid recklessly, intentionally or knowingly adversely affecting the learning, physical or mental health, or safety of a student or minor.
- Avoid recklessly, intentionally or knowingly misrepresenting facts about a student.



# Evaluations and professional development

State law requires districts to appraise teachers using either the state-developed Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) or a school board-adopted process developed by the district- and campus-level decision-making committees. On the date of this publication's printing, the Texas Legislature was considering changing the laws regarding teacher appraisals. For the most current information, please visit the ATPE website periodically at [www.atpe.org/Protection/YourDistrictAndYou/appraisals.asp](http://www.atpe.org/Protection/YourDistrictAndYou/appraisals.asp).

## WEB WATCH

If you are an eligible ATPE member in need of additional details regarding teacher appraisals, call the ATPE Member Legal Services Department at (800) 777-ATPE, or contact the department through the Member Legal Services Intake System (MLSIS) at [www.atpe.org/Protection/MLSIS](http://www.atpe.org/Protection/MLSIS).



# A look at the standard certificate

To renew your standard certificate, you must:

- Hold a valid standard certificate that has not been revoked or suspended by the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) or is not in the process of being sanctioned by SBEC;
- Successfully complete a criminal history review;
- Be in good standing on student loans and not be behind on child support payments;
- Complete a total of 150 clock hours of continuing professional education (CPE) credit from an approved provider;
- Pay a renewal fee; and
- Make sure that SBEC has your current mailing address on record.

## WEB WATCH

Visit [www.tea.state.tx.us](http://www.tea.state.tx.us) for more information on renewable certificates.



Educators certified after Sept. 1, 1999, are required to complete a minimum of 150 CPE hours during each five-year renewal period. The CPE must be offered by an SBEC-approved provider.

Activities that might count toward CPE credits include:

- Workshops.
- Conferences.
- College coursework.
- Distance-learning video conferencing or online activities.
- Independent study (not to exceed 30 hours).
- Development of curriculum or CPE training material.

- Mentor roles (not to exceed 45 clock hours).
- Participation in principal assessment (not to exceed 15 hours).

#### WEB WATCH

ATPE provides free online CPE courses open to all Texas educators at [www.atpe.org/Resources/ProfessionalDevelopment](http://www.atpe.org/Resources/ProfessionalDevelopment).



# Understanding public education law

State and federal laws, local school board policies and district administrative procedures regulate public schools. These laws and regulations can and will affect your experience in the classroom, from your certification status and appraisals to compensation and teaching strategies related to standardized testing results. To make sure your classroom procedures don't conflict with laws or local policies, consult your district's employee manual and student code of conduct. These documents should include a majority of the policies and procedures that affect you and your students.

## Major state laws related to teaching\*

Below are descriptions of a few state laws that regulate educators, schools and students.

**Provision of Education and Governance:** Texas Education Code (TEC) Chapter 1 requires equal education for all children as specified by the Texas Constitution. Chapters 7, 11 and 12 establish the governance structure the Legislature has created for public education. These chapters concern the State Board of Education, the Texas Education Agency, the commissioner of education, local school boards and districts, and charter schools.

**Educators:** TEC Chapters 21 and 22 establish professional standards for educators and the rights and benefits school districts must provide. Chapter 21 includes laws relating to educator certification, employment contracts, job dismissal, due process, appraisal, state salary schedule, planning time, duty-free lunch, freedom from required union affiliation, master teacher qualifications and staff development. Chapter 22 includes laws relating to leave, health benefits, legal protections and religious freedom.

**Parents and students:** TEC Chapter 26 establishes parental rights to access records, assessments and teaching materials and to give consent for their children to engage in certain medical and instructional activities. Chapters 28–33 establish required courses of study, grade-level advancement criteria, educational programs, textbook provision and extracurricular activity requirements. Chapter 37 covers student discipline.

**The Elementary and Secondary Education Act:** Many federal laws also affect education funding and policies, but none more so than the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (referred to as the No Child Left Behind Act). This law, first passed in 1964, includes the massive Title 1 funding program and many policy mandates. The ESEA requires states to adopt standardized testing and accountability systems and teachers to meet “highly qualified” competency standards. The act calls for stiff sanctions if schools do not meet accountability requirements.

\*The Texas Legislature was considering major changes to state education laws at the time of printing. The information included here is current as of the time of printing.

**WEB WATCH**

To view all state laws relating to K-12 public education, visit <http://portals.tea.state.tx.us/page.aspx?id=920&bc=506>.



# Special education and Section 504

Certain laws will affect your approach to special education in a classroom setting. Knowing about special education students' rights will protect both them and yourself.

## Section 504 and IDEA

Section 504 is part of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits discrimination based solely upon disability in any program receiving federal financial assistance. Any public school that receives federal funds is subject to the requirements of Section 504. Any discrimination would subject the entire institution to the possible loss of public funding. Under Section 504, a "disability" is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

The term "special education" generally refers to programs developed and run in accordance with a federal law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA requires that all students who have a disability specified in IDEA receive a free and appropriate education.

Students are eligible for federally funded special education services under IDEA if they:

- Have a physical handicap;
- Have a visual or auditory impairment;
- Are deaf-blind;
- Have mental retardation;
- Experienced a traumatic brain injury;
- Are emotionally disturbed;
- Are learning disabled;
- Have a speech handicap;
- Have an autistic disorder; or
- Meet a combination of two or more of the above.

A student is eligible for services under either IDEA or Section 504 if he has a disability and is unable to benefit from the regular educational program without modifications.

## ARDs and IEPs

Assessment of a student is needed when he is suspected of having a disability or after a referral for assessment is made by a classroom teacher or another source. A student must be assessed to determine if special instruction or related services are necessary for him to benefit from the educational program. The assessment generally requires consent from the parent or legal guardian and must be completed within 60 days from the referral date. It should also include protections for the student and parents, and it should be paid for by the school.

Admission, review and dismissal (ARD) committees make all decisions concerning a student's eligibility for services, the specific services or modifications that will be provided to the student, and the point at which the child no longer needs special education.

An ARD committee is composed, at a minimum, of a student's parents, an administrator, a representative from special education and, if the student will be educated in the regular classroom setting, a regular education teacher. There may be additional members if appropriate. Other nonvoting participants may be included if they are able to provide helpful input.

ARD committees develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each student with a disability. An IEP outlines goals for the student and specifies how those goals will be met. It may also include instructions for special therapy services, adaptive technology, modified class work or a special behavioral management plan. If a student's class work needs to be modified, those modifications may be developed through the ARD process and placed in the IEP.

Districts are responsible for seeing that all aspects of IEPs are properly implemented. Teachers are required to follow the modifications set forth in IEPs even if they do not agree with them, and each teacher of a student with disabilities should be given relevant sections of that student's IEP.



## Where should students with disabilities be educated?

IDEA presumes that students with disabilities will be educated with peers without disabilities in the least restrictive environment that is appropriate.

Districts must provide any supplementary aids and services necessary to make placement with peers without disabilities possible, such as computer-assisted technology, special furniture, a modified curriculum, training for the teacher, or provision of a special education teacher or aide—in short, whatever device(s) or service(s) necessary for the satisfactory implementation of the IEP in the regular classroom setting.

When a student is placed in a more restrictive setting, the district must be able to show that the regular setting was not appropriate for implementation of that student's IEP. If the education of other students in a class would be significantly impaired by the presence of a particular student with a disability, then that class may not be an appropriate placement for the student. However, consideration must first be given to all supplementary aids and services that might accommodate the student in a regular classroom setting.

## Discipline

The behavioral intervention plan in the IEP should govern any modifications to the discipline techniques that must be used with that particular student. If there is no behavioral intervention plan, the student is subject to the regular student code of conduct.

**Exception:** If the ARD committee determines that misconduct is caused by or has a direct and substantial relationship to the student's disability, or is caused by the district's failure to follow the IEP, then only the ARD committee has the authority to implement discipline that results in a change of placement (except for certain drug, weapon and assault-related offenses).

When appropriate, special education students may be suspended or removed to an alternative education placement (AEP) for 10 or fewer days without approval of the ARD committee, but districts must continue to provide services defined in the IEP.

For certain drug-, weapon- and assault-related offenses, a student may be removed to an AEP for up to 45 school days without approval of the ARD committee.

If a student has persistent behavioral problems that are related to a behavioral disability, the ARD committee should evaluate whether the district is providing sufficient supplementary aids and services to enable the student to obtain an appropriate

education. Efforts to accommodate a student who has a behavioral disability could include the following:

- Development of a behavioral intervention plan specifically tailored to address the student's particular disability.
- Training for the teacher in behavioral management and behavioral disabilities.
- Consultation with a behavioral specialist regarding the student's disability and implementation of his or her behavioral intervention plan.
- Coordination of behavior management strategies among all personnel who work with the student.
- Cooperation with the parents in terms of communication and follow-through on behavior management.
- Counseling and psychological services for the student.
- Provision of an aide to assist with meeting the student's needs.
- Instructional strategies provided by special education teachers or resource classes.
- The reduction of the ratio of students to instructional staff.



# ATPE membership information

ATPE offers protection, advocacy and resources to more than 116,000 Texas educators.

## Protection: Liability insurance and more

Facing a contract dispute or being sued by a parent is probably not something you're thinking about at this point in your career, but things like this can happen. ATPE wants to ensure that members are prepared should such concerns arise.

Eligible ATPE members:

- Are covered by up to \$8 million in professional liability insurance. This includes up to \$2 million per occurrence for civil rights claims brought by students, the most common reason educators are sued.\*
- Have up to \$10,000 in coverage per claim for legal costs related to employment rights protection. The benefit is guaranteed, win or lose, by an insurance contract.\*
- Have up to \$5,000 bail bond in case of a job-related arrest.\*
- May request assistance with school concerns from a staff attorney at no additional cost.\*\*

\*THE EDUCATORS PROFESSIONAL LIABILITY INSURANCE POLICY IS UNDERWRITTEN BY NATIONAL UNION FIRE INSURANCE CO. OF PITTSBURGH, PA. ALL COVERAGE IS SUBJECT TO THE EXPRESS TERMS OF THE MASTER INSURANCE POLICY ISSUED TO ATPE AND KEPT ON FILE AT THE ATPE STATE OFFICE. Coverage applies to an insured's activities within his/her professional capacity and does not apply to activities that predate the coverage period. View a summary at [www.atpe.org/Protection/LegalBenefits/in-policy.pdf](http://www.atpe.org/Protection/LegalBenefits/in-policy.pdf). Eligibility for ATPE membership benefits is contingent upon ATPE's receipt of the entire annual membership dues amount for your appropriate membership category. A disruption in payments to an authorized payment plan may result in discontinuation of such benefits, including cancellation of insurance coverage for the entire membership year retroactive to Aug. 1 or your membership date. ATPE reserves the right to determine eligibility for the appropriate membership category. The membership year runs from Aug. 1–July 31.

\*\*The insured member services and staff attorneys' assistance are offered through separate programs.

## Advocacy: Strengthening public education through action

Public policy makes a huge impact on education, your classroom and your profession. ATPE is there to make sure that educators have a positive impact on public policy and laws affecting both educators and students. The ATPE lobby team voices your concerns in the political and legislative arenas at the State Capitol and in Washington, D.C. ATPE also provides the resources you need to become an effective advocate for

your profession. Making your voice heard is important for your profession and a great way to grow both personally and professionally.

Join the ATPE Legislative Alert Network (LAN) to receive e-mails that will keep you up-to-date on the latest education issues and make it easy for you to contact your elected officials when time is of the essence. Attend local, regional and state political involvement workshops, including ATPE Lobby Day (held every other year), where you can become better informed on political issues and have a chance to meet with your state legislators. Donate to the ATPE Political Action Committee (ATPE-PAC), and your money will go toward supporting officeholders and candidates who support public education and ATPE's priorities.

Read more about these programs and find more information on ATPE's advocacy efforts at [www.atpe.org/Advocacy](http://www.atpe.org/Advocacy).

## Resources: A springboard for ideas

As a new teacher and member of ATPE, you will have access to many resources that will help you in your career, including free membership in the ATPE/PACT online mentoring system, a variety of publications, professional development opportunities, and services and discounts. *ATPE News* is a quarterly magazine full of ideas that can turn classroom challenges into successes. *Answer Key* is an e-mail newsletter for college student and teacher-trainee members. *Essentials* is another e-mail newsletter that keeps members up-to-date on the latest in education news. The ATPE website ([atpe.org](http://atpe.org)) hosts free online professional development, tips for educators, a student-teacher specific section, a link to the ATPE Idea Exchange (ATPE's online educator forum), a link to the ATPE/PACT System for mentoring services and the ATPE Book of the Month Club.

Members have the opportunity to use services such as prepaid legal services and the ATPE Online Mall. They are also eligible for savings on auto insurance and repairs, vision and dental services, hotels, car rentals, theme parks and more.

For more information, visit [www.atpe.org/Resources](http://www.atpe.org/Resources).

## ATPE Foundation scholarships

College students may apply to receive one of two ATPE Foundation scholarships:

- The Barbara Jordan Memorial Scholarship was established to honor the late Barbara Jordan, a Texas congresswoman and distinguished educator. Up to six \$1,500 scholarships are awarded each year to outstanding junior, senior and graduate students enrolled in educator preparation programs at predominantly ethnic-minority institutions.
- The Fred Wiesner Educational Excellence Scholarship was established to honor the late Fred Wiesner, one of ATPE's founding members. The program awards four \$1,500 scholarships to outstanding college students currently enrolled in educator preparation programs. Three scholarships are awarded to undergraduate college students, and one scholarship is awarded to a graduate student (if the number and quality of applicants allows).

Details about these programs and applications, as well as a list of prior-year recipients, can be found at [www.atpefoundation.org](http://www.atpefoundation.org).



# ATPE Idea Exchange

AN ONLINE COMMUNITY FOR EDUCATORS



## Classroom ideas and professional development AT YOUR FINGERTIPS!

### Visit the Idea Exchange, where you can:

- Get tips and advice from other educators.
- Share your successes and ideas.
- Find information on upcoming events and ATPE resources.
- Earn CPE credit by participating in the ATPE Book Circle.
- And more!

Click on the **Discuss Education on the Idea Exchange** link,  
which can be found on the home page at [atpe.org](http://atpe.org).



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240Tutoring is an online web application that tutors individuals for their specific TExES test. We have customized curriculum for each test that we tailor for each client. Our clients do not pass the test using "testing secrets," but rather by learning the material and concepts covered by each TExES exam. Our expert curriculum developers have cultivated their experience and talents to offer the best TExES preparation available.

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Take a basic assessment over the material.

### **Study**

Using the assessment information, start studying at your weakest point.

### **Repeat**

Assess yourself up to 3 times to chart your progress and ensure effective studying.

## **Pass the test!**





# FREE ONLINE MENTORING

Your first few years in the classroom can be challenging, but ATPE is here for you with access to mentors in your field.

- Receive personalized advice from experienced e-mentors within 24 hours of submitting a question.
- Share ideas on message boards and in chat rooms.
- Access teaching resources and tools.

For more information and to register for this free program, visit [www.atpe.org/Resources/PACT](http://www.atpe.org/Resources/PACT).

