



## Ending the Chaos in Middle and High School Science

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Author: Kimberly G. Massey

Email: [kmassey@rhmail.org](mailto:kmassey@rhmail.org)

ADEPT was our state's teacher evaluation system when I entered the field of education. Classroom management was never my highest score. Some days my students drove me absolutely crazy. I just couldn't anticipate the multitude of potential misbehaviors. Early on, I experienced some rather chaotic days. Some so chaotic that I contemplated whether or not teaching was for me.

I always had the highest of expectations for my students. Students said my class was hard, but they liked it. They could tell that I enjoyed teaching and couldn't get enough of my subject matter as I constantly sought to bring real-world connections to their attention. Students, I have observed, give teachers feedback whether they ask for it or not. The best feedback I never asked for was the comment, "Oh, it's time to go already!" In educational jargon, that meant the class period was productive, engaging, rigorous, and fun! I didn't hear this everyday, but once or twice a week was always enough to keep my spirits high. As time went on, my classroom management improved. I suppose, I had truly, "seen it all," and was then able to get in front of it.

Teaching Science, with labs and other hands-on learning opportunities makes Science classrooms potentially more chaotic, if clear understandings are not in place. **Teachers must have classroom rules.** Whether the teacher sets the rules with the class on the first day, or the teacher has already set the rules before students ever enter the room, rules and procedures must be in place. **Classroom rules must be posted in a highly visible area and they must be explained to students on the first day of class.** As

youngsters, teachers were probably the most well-behaved students. For this reason, many teachers overlook the need to set classroom rules. They mistakenly believe that their students will be as eager to learn as they are to teach. In some countries, in some schools, and in some courses this is reality. In other places, attendance is compulsory, so everyone is not happy to be there. Every Science teacher has heard a student say, “you know Science is not really my thing.” Rules are needed for these students, and some classes have more of these students than others.

In addition to rules, **there must be consequences for breaking the rules.** Consequences. These are hard. Consequences should be clear and certain. They should be an unpleasant deterrent to students who break rules after being warned. Teachers must be a bit creative with consequences. Standing in the corner or wearing the dunce cap may have been creative at one time, but new, modern consequences must be developed. Maybe students must copy the rules, maybe they must write a letter of apology, maybe they stay/return for lunch detention to sweep the classroom, clean desktops, wash testtubes, etc. Additionally, **there must be consequences for individuals, groups, and the whole class.** It is not advised that the whole class be penalized for the misbehaviors of a few. **The whole class rarely misbehaves.** For this reason, whole class incentives are effective because students who want the incentive will help regulate the behaviors of their peers.

Rules are necessary and consequences help the rules to be enforced. **Procedures are also a necessary component of good classroom management.** Kindergarten teachers often say they the first three to four weeks are spent on procedures, then they continue to practice things like how to get in line and how to sit on the rug for the entire year. Teens and preteens need procedures, too. Teachers must define for students how they are to move from their desks to their small groups. Teachers must define how and when laptops or other electronic devices are to be used. Before each individual lab, teachers must review the safety procedures. They must explain the clean up procedure. There should be procedures for how class should start and how class should end. When the development of procedures is left up to the students, chaos is the result. Worse, is the discontentment of the teacher.

A final word about classroom management is **there is power in planning.** At least 50% of effective teaching is a result of effective planning. I recently assisted a teacher, struggling with classroom management, in developing a good lesson and I was there to assist in executing it. One of the comments I heard from a student as the bell rang, was “dang, we didn’t waste any time today!” I suspect that one reason the teacher was

having such management difficulties was that there was little attention given to planning. **Planning is time-consuming and it must be intentional.**

A school year is 180 days, on paper, but there are not 180 teaching days. For high schools, teaching a semester course, the time constraints are even more dire. There is a great deal of content to teach, and many teachers report that students are not ready for the content. They must be taught preliminary concepts before they can be taught the standards for the current course. **There is no time to waste. We cannot afford to give students 90-minutes to complete 15-minute assignments.** Every moment of class time is important and must be accounted for in the lesson-planning process. **It is during downtime that rules are most often broken.** If students have work to do, they will not have time to misbehave. How can downtime be minimized? 1)Develop plans that use the Workshop Model for Secondary Science. 2)Plan more than can be completed in a class period. 3)Assign a project that students are to work on at home, or in class if they have downtime. 4)Supply students with readings that are related to course content, but go beyond the standards. For a few extra points they will read and share with the class.

As a new teacher, I struggled with classroom management, but after a few years, with the proper rules, procedures, and consequences in place, student misbehavior was minimized. **I find that school administrators are much more apt to offer a consequence when they see that a misbehaving student has exhausted the teacher's consequences.** Contacting school administration should be a last resort. As the classroom leader, it is up to the teacher to set the expectations and support students to reach those expectations. **In supporting our students and setting expectations, we must always model that which we expect.** If we do not want students using their phones during class, we must refrain from using ours, too. If we are respectful to students they will be respectful to us. Using expressions like “ma’am” and “sir,” when addressing students is a gentle way of reminding them to use those terms when addressing adults. Planning means thinking ahead. Educators must think ahead in terms of rules and procedures, teaching the content, as well as assessment. For me, over-planning has proven to be the most effective method of minimizing downtime, hence classroom chaos.

Your thoughts and comments are welcome at [kmassey@rhmail.org](mailto:kmassey@rhmail.org) .