It's Testing Season Again: Tips to Help Students Beat the Testing Blues

Testing season is upon us once again, bringing with it the cold, clammy hands and terrified faces of students who would rather do just about anything other than being chained to a desk for hours all week taking one test after another. Some kids simply hate tests (make that the majority of kids, actually) while others experience crippling anxiety at the mere thought of all that testing. Being a substitute teacher during these times is tough because there is not a lot of wiggle room in that demanding testing schedule for anything fun. Whether you are in the classroom during that week leading up to testing, or right in the thick of it, there are ways you can help your students cope:

1. Recognize signs of anxiety. These tests can trigger severe anxiety in some students. Overachievers don’t fear the test itself, they fear the possibility of failing (for some, it’s the possibility of getting anything less than a perfect score). Students who aren’t great at test-taking fear the actual test—they might work themselves into a panic at the prospect of being faced with difficult problems or directions they don’t understand. It’s important to be able to recognize the signs of anxiety that these students will begin to show—complaints of stomachaches and headaches are quite common, moodiness, frequent trips to the bathroom, excessive fidgeting, new nervous habits—each student is different and they won’t all show the same signs. Once you notice these signs, try speaking with the child one-on-one to try and alleviate their fears. You can even reach out to a parent to let them know about the issue so they can discuss it at home—many students worry that they’ll let their parents down if they don’t do well, so reassurance from them can make a big difference.

2. Encourage a positive attitude and healthy habits. We all know that children are very good at picking up on the emotions of those around them. Many teachers become stressed during the testing season because their students’ grades are viewed as a reflection of their teaching ability. Unfortunately, this creates an unending cycle of stress—the students feed off their teacher’s stress.

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Even though you are only in the classroom temporarily, you can have a positive impact on the students. Keep a bright and cheerful outlook and provide the kids with some healthy tips that will boost their mood and brain power. Remind them how important it is to get lots of sleep during testing, eat a fantastic breakfast (send them home with some handouts filled with awesome, easy breakfast ideas packed with great foods to boost brain power—parents will appreciate the tips), and wake up early so they are not starting their days with the stress of running late.

3. Combat the stress. There are certain situations that can make an already stressful situation even worse—broken pencils, lost calculators, forgotten snacks... Be prepared for those situations by getting extra testing materials ready in the morning—sharpen lots of pencils, have extra erasers, make sure all the calculators are working properly, and have a stash of healthy snacks like granola bars, apples, and bottled water. Take advantage of any breaks between tests—this is an opportunity to help the students unwind and clear their minds. Use techniques such as stretching, deep breathing, meditation, and simple yoga poses. Play some soothing music while they relax to break up the monotony of those long silences during testing.

Testing season is hard on teachers and students. Teachers feel the incredible burden of proving their worth through the students’ grades on these tests, and the students face the arduous task of tests that take hours to complete. Anxiety levels are high and coming in to substitute teach during these times can be quite a challenge. Don’t let the stress rub off on you—your calm, positive attitude can make all the difference to those students.

Four Benefits of Being a Long-Term Substitute Teacher

There are many reasons a school might be seeking a long-term substitute teacher. Maybe they do not have enough teachers, and they need someone to fill-in until they can hire a permanent teacher. Maybe an extended illness has caused a teacher to take several weeks off. Perhaps, the permanent teacher is on maternity leave. No matter the reason for the school’s need for a long-term substitute teacher, the idea of being a long-term sub can be intimidating for some people. Fortunately, there are at least four benefits of being a long-term substitute teacher.

Experience

If you have a teaching degree or are working toward one, the experience gained working as a long-term sub can be especially valuable. Often you will create lesson plans, establish your own behavior rules, and gain teaching experience that you would not get from working in a different classroom every day. This will help you better understand how you want to handle things in your own classroom. It can be an especially valuable experience if you are subbing in a classroom where you are teaching the grade level or subject you hope to one day teach.

Relationships

It is a great experience to get to work with the same kids on a daily basis. You get to know their names. You start to understand what to expect from the kids. You come to understand what kids are going to be helpful and which kids may cause a disruption. You are also able to build relationships with other teachers in the school as well as people such as the secretary and principal. The relationships you build with other adults can help you to get a permanent job.

Increased Pay

Long-term substitute teachers generally need to create lesson plans, grade papers, and do other tasks that short-term subs only do on a limited level. Because of this, long-term substitute teachers are often paid more per day. (VUSD pays our long-term substitute teachers $139 per day.)

No Need to Search for a New Job Daily

Perhaps one of the most exciting benefits of a long-term subbing position is that you do not have to worry about finding a new job each day. You will have the same position for several weeks, or at times, several months at a time. Plus, you do not have to keep track of where you will be on a specific day.

How To Manage High School Classrooms as a Substitute

Having proper classroom management when substituting in a high school classroom can be difficult. These students have years of experience with substitute teachers. In some cases, they have years of experience manipulating substitute teachers. Because of this, it is important to take control of the classroom right away.

Know the Classroom Rules and School Policies
In many cases, the teacher will either include the classroom rules in the lesson plans, or they will be posted on the wall. Read these through. Understand what is and what is not considered acceptable classroom behavior. Some teachers will allow food and drinks in the classroom while others have rules against bringing anything other than water into the classroom. Some teachers have strict rules about students who are tardy. Understand these rules, and follow them. It might not seem like a big thing to let one student eat the rest of his breakfast burrito while you are taking attendance or to let it slide when one of the students comes into class five minutes late. The problem is that how you handle the small things sets a standard for how you will handle the bigger issues. If you appear to be a pushover on the smaller issues, students may begin to think you will be a pushover on the bigger issues. Plus, high school students talk. If you let things slide in one class, the students in the later classes will expect the same thing.

Establish Your Stance on Cell Phones in Class Right Away
Many high school students are never without their phones, but that does not mean they need to be texting friends or looking up things on them while you are teaching. Many school and districts have policies on cell phone use while at school. In some cases, simply seeing the cell phone is enough of a reason for the teacher to take it away. Even if the normal teacher does not adhere to the policy, you can often turn to the official policy when telling the students that they cannot use their cell phones in class. Generally, it is best to try to stick to the same policy when it comes to cell phones, particularly in the same school. Otherwise, you may hear complaints about how you let another class use them. Of course, you can always establish a stricter policy, but you need to be ready to fight the protests, at least in the beginning.

Avoid Down-Time
Students of all ages can take advantage of unfilled class time, but high schoolers are especially good at taking unstructured time and turning it into an environment that is hard to get control over again. The less down-time you have in your lesson, the better control you’ll have over the room. This doesn’t mean there can’t be ‘free time’ if called for, but it needs to be structured and with set parameters before starting. This will keep the class moving smoothly and keep the control on your side.

Smile
It’s simple: kids respond better to likable adults. You can still keep a firm line while smiling and being kind. Set the tone for the room with positivity and you will usually receive it in return.

Managing a High School Classroom

1. Know the Classroom Rules and School Policies
2. Establish Your Stance on Cell Phones in Class Right Away
3. Avoid Down-Time
4. Smile

VUSD Beliefs

We believe that...

All students have a unique capacity to learn.

Risk taking, effort and perseverance lead to excellence and innovation.

Individuals learn and work best in a safe, nurturing environment.

Important Dates—May/June

May 28  Memorial Day (No School)
June 5–7  RBVHS/MVHS/VHS Finals (Minimum Days)
June 6–7  MVHS Finals (Minimum Days)
June 7    Last Day of School

Principal’s Corner

Thank you to the following substitute teachers from our site Principals:

Courtney Robertson began with us as a student teacher and has continued to be a professional, engaged substitute. She is highly motivated to learn and grow and can be counted on.

Sandra Ceja, Principal at Foothill Oak Elementary

Victoria Ades has subbed in all grades for Foothill Oak Elementary and did student teaching in Kinder and Fourth grade. She is very diligent and flexible. Her area of interest is history, but does a great job in multiple subjects.

Sandra Ceja, Principal at Foothill Oak Elementary

Ashley Blair is a stellar sub, and we appreciate her! She is a positive, reliable sub—she honors her commitments, and she has developed relationships with students such that all on campus see Ashley as a true Lake teacher and afford her that respect.

Krista Berntsen, Principal at Lake Elementary

If you have any questions on using the SmartFind Express, please contact Laura Lemly:
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