



What did you learn this year?

For next time: How do you start the school year off right?

Send responses, as well as suggestions for future questions, to sage@edutopia.org, or visit Sage Advice on the Web at www.edutopia.org/sageadvice. (Responses may be edited for length and clarity.)

* After surviving Hurricane Katrina, which destroyed our school, I have learned the following:

1. Stuff is just stuff and can be replaced.
2. People in your life are the most precious commodity.
3. Be flexible about how you teach, what you teach, where you teach—just teach!

JULIE MASSEY
MUSIC TEACHER, ST. MARTIN MIDDLE SCHOOL
OCEAN SPRINGS, MISSISSIPPI

It's more valuable to add features to an instruction model based on comprehensible input and value to both teacher and student than it is to simplify one that is more complex and clinical and often requires expensive trainers.

TIM HAAG
CURRICULUM AND TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT TEACHER, GREATER ALBANY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
ALBANY, OREGON

* After dealing with Hurricane Katrina and the effects it has had on our school and community, I have learned that children are the perfect model of resiliency, adaptability, and enthusiasm.

CRAIG HOWAT
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COORDINATOR, LULING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LULING, LOUISIANA

When students aren't responding to what you're teaching, rather than slowing down and going back to basics, it actually works better to pick up the pace and challenge them more. When I raised my expectations of what my students were capable of, they surprised me with their abilities to work at a higher cognitive level. I just had to give them the chance!

HOLLY RAE BEMIS-SCHURTZ
TECHNOLOGY TEACHER, PICACHO MIDDLE SCHOOL
LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO

* I learned that high school students have a passion for learning. I learned that in order for them to have a passion, I have to motivate them. I learned that in order to motivate a high school student, I have to care about them. I learned that in order to care about them, I have to get to know them. I learned that in order to get to know them, I have to learn to teach them.

MARGO HEIDENREICH
TEACHER, COMPUTER TECH AND SPANISH
PIEDMONT COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL
GASTONIA, NORTH CAROLINA

I learned that you never know how the little things that you do affect the lives of others, especially your students. I am the one assigned to standing at the front door to greet the students as they get out of their cars every morning. I was ill for several days, and the weather was bad when I came back, so I missed about two weeks of morning greetings. When I finally got back, I had several parents email me to tell me how happy their kids were to see me outside that morning. One child said that their day just didn't go right without the morning hello. Don't stop doing the little things, because you never know what kind of an impact they have on the students.

HEIDI MCDANIEL
LOWER SCHOOL TECHNOLOGY TEACHER
UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF JACKSON
JACKSON, TENNESSEE



*** I learned that sixth graders will throw each other under the bus every chance they get. And eighth graders just want to sneak onto the bus to make out!**

ROBYN GRAMLY
LIBRARY AIDE, PROSPER MIDDLE SCHOOL
PROSPER, TEXAS

I've learned you can't control how others will react, although you can control how you choose to respond.

CHARLENE BROWN
MUSIC TEACHER, RAYMOND CENTRAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
VALPARAISO, NEBRASKA

*** Eager to try some new approaches with my eighth graders, I dove into the world of iPhoto, iMovie, PowerPoint, and online discussion forum—all in one semester. It has been exhilarating watching my students spread their wings to try these various media-laden activities, many of which they use more competently than I do. I have learned many computer tricks, but the most useful information I can pass to colleagues is this: Know your software and hardware requirements and capabilities before launching into a project that may be doomed by incompatibility or school-network crashes. Work closely with your tech people before you begin, and you'll see triumph, not disappointment, on your students' faces.**

MARGARET HERBERGER
EIGHTH-GRADE AND COLLEGE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE-ACQUISITION TEACHER
BUFFALO, NEW YORK

Of all the things I learned this year, the most important is how to give students the tools to find their voices. We have blogged with soldiers in Iraq, used a wiki to write collaboratively across classes, made movies to promote childhood safety in our community, and experimented with podcasting the news at our school. Through all these twenty-first-century tools, their voices are being heard loud and clear!

APRIL CHAMBERLAIN
TECHNOLOGY TEAM LEADER, PAINE INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL
TRUSSVILLE, ALABAMA

*** As a relatively new teacher, I learned that no matter how diligently you prepare for all things expected, the unexpected will occur. And when the unexpected happens, consider yourself more prepared than you were to begin with.**

COURTNEY COOK DAVIS
FRESHMAN LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHER
HILLCREST HIGH SCHOOL
EVERGREEN, ALABAMA

I learned and continue to relearn how important it is to be a great listener. The only avenue of communication with my high school students is paved with the trust they grant me because I acknowledge who they are by listening to them. I don't try to solve their problems, I don't act as an expert, I don't try to fix who they are; I just listen.

WOODY PLAUT
LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALIST
KONAWAENA HIGH SCHOOL
KEALAKEKUA, HAWAII

*** Taking a few minutes to acknowledge those students who are especially helpful or kind or who display qualities of integrity or courage makes everyone happy. A note on pretty stationery, a phone call home to say, "Your kid is great!" or an email all work wonderfully. The student feels valued, the parents are proud, and I feel terrific.**

DEBRA PIPER
COMPUTER SCIENCE TEACHER
SAINT URSULA ACADEMY
CINCINNATI, OHIO