
Create a Room You Can Live In

Given how much time you spend in your classroom, it should be both pleasing to the eye and functional. Sometimes, teachers focus so much on making their room *child*-friendly that they overlook their own needs. Don't. Consider the following.

- Establish personal space.
Your desk should be reserved for you. Tell your students that your desk is your personal space (just as their desks or lockers are theirs), and ask them to respect that. They should not use it for their assignments, belongings, or anything else. Even if your desk is a mess, it will be *your* mess, not theirs.
- Post important papers.
You need a special place for memos and important papers, so that they don't magically disappear. The best idea for frequently used pages is to tack them to a bulletin board beside your desk. (This works much like the fridge at home.) Don't worry about keeping this board tidy. Tack everything there as it comes to you, and nothing will get lost. You can clean it up weekly.
- Loosen the tight reins.
You don't have to do it all. Lighten up a little and let some of the need to keep everything in perfect order go. For teachers who absolutely need order, letting the reins slacken may be a tough task, but it's better to spend precious time with children than cleaning your room.
- Delegate the dirty work.
Others can clean up for you. There are always students who genuinely love to help the teacher, no matter how tedious and nasty the job may seem. Let them tidy the room, arrange "piles," or reorganize clutter. They may not do it exactly as you would, but the day is too short to worry about this.
- Create a clutter corner.
Get clutter out of sight and it will be less stress provoking. You know what I mean—all the boxes, piles, assortments of "stuff" that invariably work their way into the classroom. Instead of having them lying around, where you can see them and keep thinking that you must do something about them, put them all in one corner and hide them behind a screen. A cardboard screen can be decorated by your students. If it's out of sight, it's out of the stress zone.
- Buy yourself some time.
Create a silent reading nook. If students who are finished their work have a corner for reading, you will have more time to help the strugglers. No soft couch or chair? Push a table against a wall and throw cushions underneath it and books on top of it. Students, even the big ones, love to crawl under and read.