



# *Your First Classroom*

ATPE'S GUIDE FOR FIRST-TIME  
TEXAS TEACHERS



**Association of Texas  
Professional Educators®**

# About ATPE

The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) is Texas’s preeminent educators’ association and the nation’s largest independent association for public school educators. 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 association that believes it takes everyone working together to better public education.

## ATPE works for you

You want to make a difference in your students’ lives. ATPE wants nothing to stand in your way. As an educator, you have many variables to consider each day, including interactions with your employer, students, and their parents. That’s why we provide the protection, advocacy, and resources that free you from many of your day-to-day worries and help you focus on your students. ATPE will provide you with ongoing support throughout your career.

Eligible ATPE members:

- Receive liability insurance,\* employment rights defense,\* and assistance from full-time staff attorneys.\*\*
- Are confident that their views and concerns about 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, DC.
- Have access to quality publications, online tools, innovative professional learning opportunities, and useful services and discounts.

See page 33 and visit [atpe.org](http://atpe.org) for more details.

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

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The information in this book is intended to be suggestions, based on general best practices. Always refer to campus and district policies.

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# 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
- Instructional materials and classroom management tips for a substitute

# Finding Your Dream Job

Most Texas school districts interview candidates for teaching positions during the late spring and summer. School districts will sometimes 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.\*)

To find job opportunities, visit school district websites—most will have a special section devoted to job openings. You can also call the district's personnel or superintendent's office.

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ATPE offers job search resources on our website. Visit [atpe.org](http://atpe.org) and look in the Resources section.

## Before submitting your résumé or application

It's important to be aware of your online presence and to keep it professional; potential employers might look at your online social profile when considering you for a position. Keep these tips in mind:

- Use a professional email address. Prospective employers will not be impressed if you send communications to them with casual email addresses such as *partygirl@gmail.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 to ask that the information be removed.
- Make sure information on your social media sites is professional, and use privacy settings to ensure only certain viewers can access your profile.
- Join a professional networking site such as LinkedIn to share your professional accomplishments and goals with potential employers.



## 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 among instruction and learning, assessments, and teacher performance appraisals.
- Know the school district's goals, and demonstrate 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.
- Ask questions. Remember: Interviews are about finding the right match both for the campus and for you.

For additional tips on pre-employment planning and interviewing:

- Review ATPE's list of job search resources at [atpe.org/Resources/Job-Search-Resources](http://atpe.org/Resources/Job-Search-Resources) for important job search websites and Education Service Center employment sites.
- Get general career and résumé advice at [job.com](http://job.com).
- Perfect your résumé using the helpful do's and don'ts found at [careeronestop.org](http://careeronestop.org).
- Find advice on getting hired and starting your career at [educationworld.com/jobs](http://educationworld.com/jobs).

# Before Your First 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) has developed two complementary bodies of rules, the Educators' Code of Ethics and its own disciplinary rules, that 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 Texas Education Agency (TEA) website at [tea.texas.gov](http://tea.texas.gov). In addition, read the chapter on professional responsibilities beginning on page 19 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 or when students are present.
- Intentionally or knowingly misrepresent past employment, criminal history, or a disciplinary record when applying for employment.
- Solicit or engage in sexual conduct or a romantic relationship with a student or minor.

## 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, your assigned mentor, the campus principal, the secretaries and other office staff members, the custodians, and the para-educators with whom you might work.

## Align your teaching goals with campus performance goals

In recent years, the TEKS and student assessments have been integrated into campus performance goals and lesson plans. It's likely that your campus has a curriculum guide to help you meet performance objectives. Some districts have lesson plan requirements or templates that must be followed. For example, your district might have adopted the TEKS Resource System or another standards-based curriculum management tool. If your district has a curriculum director, consult him or her on the district's specific expectations.

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.

Find more information about the TEKS and state assessments  
at [tea.texas.gov](http://tea.texas.gov).

## **Familiarize yourself with policies**

Read your district's employee handbook and know district and campus 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).
- Student discipline.
- Required classroom discipline plans (if applicable).
- Contact with parents.
- Phone and Internet use.
- Grading and reporting.
- Textbook assignment.
- Use of school audiovisual equipment.
- Professional learning.

## **Prepare a letter to send home with students**

Write an introductory letter to parents that includes the school phone number and your extension, your email 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. Visit the Services and Discounts page at [atpe.org](http://atpe.org) and check out the savings available to ATPE members at places like Office Depot and Costco.

## Establish procedures

Decide how you will begin and end each class period or content area, and distribute and collect instructional materials. Establish guidelines for the cleanup of work areas, student use of classroom computers and other technology, safety routines, and homework assignments. Make expectations clear by posting them in your classroom or on your class webpage. 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 might 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 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 also a great way to get parents and students involved in the curriculum and reinforce learning.

## Standardized testing resources

In 2012, Texas educators began to implement the first round of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). If you grew up in Texas public schools, you already know that the style, frequency, and name of Texas's standardized tests change often (and might have already changed again by the time you read this).

But one of your responsibilities will always be to ready your students for whatever standardized tests come their way.

To help your students prepare, consult the TEA's website ([tea.texas.gov](http://tea.texas.gov)) for:

- Comprehensive information about test content.
- Blueprints and sample questions.
- Testing day requirements.
- Bilingual guides.
- Resources for special education students and English-language learners.

# Succeeding on 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 how 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 a first-day take-home activity that involves their parents/guardians.
- Ask secondary students to list contact information on a notecard. Suggest they include email 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 to begin each 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, too, 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 Classroom Management

Get a handle 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. Ask students to come up with their top five rules as a group. Visibly display them in the classroom, and revisit them often.

## Make classroom rules stick

- Make sure rules revolve 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 negative feelings.
- 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 breaking rules. Physical activity has been proven to stimulate learning and serves as an outlet for students to expend extra energy.
- Never resort to corporal punishment unless your actions are in strict compliance with district policy.

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, and then prioritize and complete each project in order.

## Delegate tasks

Ask fellow teachers about the support resources available to you. Check with your principal or other administrators 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. In addition to helping you save time on small tasks, giving students some responsibilities is a great classroom management technique.

## 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 would otherwise be overlooked.

## Keep a professional learning record

Your professional learning folder should include your professional certification; university diplomas and transcripts; your employment contract and notice(s) of assignment; honors, commendations, and awards; records of all professional learning 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.

Learn about ATPE's professional learning opportunities at [atpe.org/CPE](https://atpe.org/CPE).

# Communication between School and Home

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

- Open the lines of communication by sending a note of introduction to each parent at the beginning of the year. Be sure to include schedule and contact information. 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 able 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 child's work. Let parents know how their child is succeeding and how he or she can improve.
- Be positive when speaking with parents. When you mention areas their child could work on, also praise the student for something he or she 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 the language the parents speak, ask a co-worker who is fluent to help you translate messages.
- Keep records of all contacts you have with parents, including copies of emails 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. 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 using physical barriers, such as by sitting behind a desk.
- Keep an open mind and listen to everything the parents say (both verbally and nonverbally) 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 on your conversation with the parents, especially if you sense that 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 child feels about school. Has \_\_\_\_\_ mentioned anything to you?"
- "I thought perhaps we could share some information about \_\_\_\_\_ that would make him or 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 proactively 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.
- Remind students of their responsibility to cooperate and conduct themselves properly during your absence.
- Warn students about the consequences of a bad report from a substitute.
- Make students aware of any special arrangements you have made to assist the substitute.
- Create a substitute folder that includes a list of important classroom numbers, phone extensions, room locations, and more.
- Gather the following materials in your substitute folder:
  - A welcome note with names of helpful teachers and students.
  - A student roster of those who have classroom-related health conditions.
  - A seating chart.
  - Information about 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, we suggest that 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, administrators, and colleagues

- Learn your rights and obligations to your employer by reading your contract, your teacher handbook, and related documentation.
- While you can professionally express your disagreement, 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 an administrator's involvement.
- Know your district's policies on communicating with students through social media, email, and 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 administrators and colleagues.
- Attempt to resolve conflicts amicably before taking serious concerns to your supervisor.

## Responsibilities related to your students

- Avoid physical contact with students inside or outside of the classroom unless it is to protect yourself or another from physical harm.
- Ensure that 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 a test.
- Report suspected child abuse within 48 hours to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services at (800) 252-5400.
- Do not try to be a “buddy” or friend with your students. If you do need to counsel a student regarding personal matters, let an administrator or counselor know.
- Avoid engaging in written or electronic communications that could be construed as inappropriate, and refrain from socializing with a student (see below).

### A CLOSER LOOK AT TEXTING STUDENTS

In some situations, questions arise as to whether texting is evidence of an inappropriate relationship between an educator and a student. When texting started to become a focus of investigations by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), investigators often found themselves stymied because the messages had been deleted by both teacher and student.

The State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) can now conclude that communications were inappropriate based on the timing and frequency of texts sent. The logic behind this rule is that the chance that texts were inappropriate is higher if the messages were sent in the evening or at night. It is also assumed that the subject matter is inappropriate if there are a great number of texts because it seems more likely the communication was about personal matters, rather than academic ones.

Be wary of chatting with students by text because it is possible that those chats could look suspicious.

# Evaluations

State law requires districts to appraise teachers using either the state-recommended appraisal system or a school board-adopted process developed by the district- and campus-level decision-making committees. As of the date of this publication's printing, many districts will be adopting the new state-recommended appeal system—the T-TESS. For the most current information, please visit [atpe.org/T-TESS](http://atpe.org/T-TESS).

Is your district a District of Innovation or considering becoming one? See [atpe.org/DOI](http://atpe.org/DOI) to learn how this designation could affect you.

If you are an eligible ATPE member in need of additional details regarding teacher appraisals, call the ATPE Member Legal Services Department at (800) 777-2873, or contact the department through the Member Legal Services Intake System (MLSIS) at [atpe.org](http://atpe.org).



# 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);
- Successfully complete a criminal history review;
- Be in good standing on student loans and 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.

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 (ATPE is one such provider). Educators may be audited by TEA and should accurately track all CPE hours.

Visit [tea.texas.gov](http://tea.texas.gov) for more information on renewable certificates.

Activities that might count toward CPE credits include:

- Workshops.
- Conferences.
- College coursework.
- Distance-learning video conferencing or online webinars.
- 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).

ATPE provides online professional learning opportunities to all Texas educators on the Professional Learning Portal, which is accessible through [atpe.org/CPE](http://atpe.org/CPE).

## When you think CPE, think ATPE!

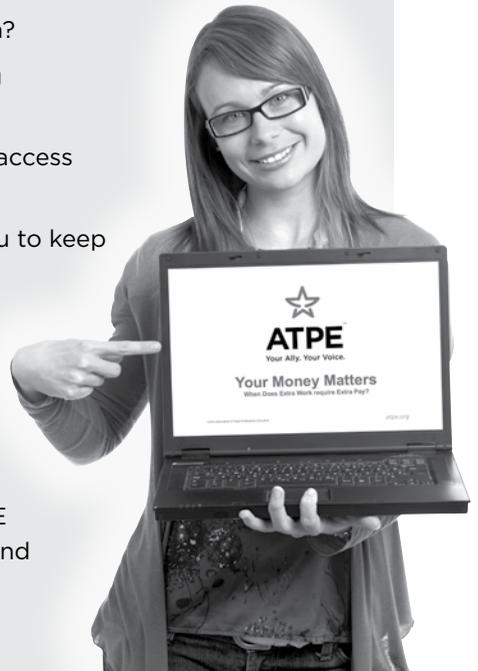
### DID YOU KNOW...

- ATPE produces new content almost every month?
- Our strategic partners offer professional learning opportunities for ATPE members?
- The ATPE Professional Learning Portal provides access to on-demand webinars and other CPE courses?
- The ATPE Professional Learning Portal allows you to keep track of your CPE hours?

### BEST OF ALL, THESE RESOURCES ARE **FREE TO ATPE MEMBERS.**

Visit [atpe.org/CPE](http://atpe.org/CPE) to get started earning CPE today.

Are you an expert in your field? Submit a course proposal form for the opportunity to develop a CPE course for ATPE. Course proposal forms can be found at [atpe.org/CPE](http://atpe.org/CPE).



# 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.

Is your district a District of Innovation or considering becoming one? See [atpe.org/DOI](http://atpe.org/DOI) to learn how this designation could affect you.

## 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, the 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 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA):** This federal law—originally known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—was first passed in 1965 and recently updated in December 2015. The ESSA requires states to adopt standardized testing and accountability systems and requires identification of and intervention in struggling schools. It also provides federal funding to local school districts, charter schools, and states.

Visit [atpe.org/advocacy](http://atpe.org/advocacy) and [atpe.org/protection](http://atpe.org/protection) to learn more about state and federal laws and regulations. To view all state laws relating to K-12 public education, visit [tea.texas.gov](http://tea.texas.gov).



# 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 intellectual disability;
- Have 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 or she 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 or she 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 or her 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 student 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.

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

More than 100,000 Texas educators choose ATPE, making it the largest professional educators' association in Texas. Learn more about ATPE's protection, advocacy, and resources at [atpe.org](http://atpe.org).

## 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 situations like this can arise. ATPE wants to ensure that members are prepared should they face such concerns.

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.\*
- May receive 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 detailed summary at [atpe.org](http://atpe.org). 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 attorney assistance are offered through separate programs.

## 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 a variety of publications, professional learning opportunities, and services and discounts.

- *ATPE News* is a quarterly magazine full of ideas that can turn classroom challenges into successes.
- The ATPE Blog and our semi-monthly email newsletter keep members up to date on the latest in education news.
- The ATPE Professional Learning Portal ([atpe.org/CPEv](http://atpe.org/CPEv)) hosts free online professional development, CPE hour tracking, and tips for educators.

- YES Texas! is the Young Educators' Society, and it provides valuable resources for all new educators (regardless of age). If you need help getting through your first few years on campus, we're here to support you.

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

## **Advocacy: Strengthening public education through action**

Public policy makes a huge impact on education, your classroom, and your profession. ATPE is there to help educators have a positive impact on public policy and laws affecting both educators and students. ATPE's staff and contract lobbyists professionally voice your concerns in the political and legislative arenas at the State Capitol and in Washington, DC. 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.

Visit *TeachtheVote.org*, ATPE's advocacy website, to stay up to date on the latest education issues with in-depth information about elections, the Texas legislature, and state rule-making boards. For the latest advocacy developments, follow *@TeachtheVote* and ATPE's individual lobbyists on Twitter.

ATPE's lobby team provides legislative updates at the ATPE Summit and other regional meetings throughout the year. For interactive learning about education issues and a chance to meet with your state legislators, attend ATPE at the Capitol, our popular political involvement training and lobby day event held in odd-numbered years.

Advocacy Central is ATPE's newest grassroots lobbying tool for members only. The website allows you to find and communicate with your elected officials, track bills, read ATPE's positions on key legislation, and make use of sample messages to quickly share your input with powerful decision makers.

During election cycles, the ATPE Political Action Committee (ATPE-PAC) supports Texas officeholders and candidates who stand up for public education and ATPE's priorities. The ATPE-PAC relies on voluntary, personal donations from individual ATPE members.

Learn more about all these advocacy tools at [atpe.org/advocacy](http://atpe.org/advocacy).

# NEW TO THE CLASSROOM? CHECK THIS OUT!

**Congratulations on making the decision to become a Texas teacher! You have a difficult but wonderful journey ahead of you, and ATPE is here to make the road as smooth as possible. Here are just a few ways ATPE will be there for you now—and throughout your career.**

## ATPE Educator Exchange



The ATPE Educator Exchange is a Facebook group where ATPE members can connect, share, and get the support they need to succeed as educators. It's a safe place to ask questions, get advice, and share ideas with trusted ATPE educators. Visit [facebook.com/groups/ATPEeducatorexchange](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ATPEeducatorexchange) and request to join this community of educators who are passionate and determined to be the best they can be!

## ATPE News



As a teacher, your time is precious. Keeping up with the latest education news can be a challenge. But ATPE makes it easy. With your membership, you'll get a subscription to our award-winning quarterly magazine, *ATPE News*, which covers Texas education news and trends and provides legal and advocacy updates.

## Free Professional Development



No one walks into the classroom knowing everything. That's why ATPE has an extensive library of online courses that count toward the continuing professional education credits you need. Topics include classroom management, differentiated instruction, working with students with disabilities, education law, STAAR, and more. Go to [atpe.org/CPE](https://www.atpe.org/CPE) to access ATPE's Professional Learning Portal.

## YES Texas!



The YES Texas! Advisory Council helps ATPE meet the needs of future, young, and new educators, and makes sure we deliver products that meet those needs. ATPE takes the council's recommendations to heart—we have created many new programs for young educators based on their advice!

**ATPE.ORG**  
**(800) 777-2873**



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