

What Principals Want

“As a principal, what would you expect of first-year teachers in your school?” I recently posed this question to a group of 18 teachers pursuing advanced degrees in educational administration. Their reflections provide some insights on apprehensions commonly associated with the first-year teaching experience.

Prospective teachers’ concerns invariably relate to student learning and motivation, classroom management, the needs of a diverse student population, and support from parents and administration. Principal and mentor teacher expectations should not be one of these concerns. Understanding educational leaders’ expectations helps establish a collaborative relationship.

Each respondent listed skills or traits that he or she considers essential in new teachers. Knowledge of content area was the most prevalent response, probably because most respondents were in middle and high schools. As a high school assistant principal and math teacher commented, “I think that the knowledge of subject matter must be the foundation for any teacher. No teacher can learn and successfully apply strategies and methods without first having a firm grasp on the topic they are to present.”

As a new teacher, clearly, you must know and be prepared to teach your subject. Though the point may seem self-evident, the issue raises an important question for your own preparation: “How well do I know and understand the subject matter that I will be teaching?”

Sadly, this question is worthy of reflection, because so many novices spend their first year teaching out of their field.

President Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” agenda has declared that “highly qualified” middle or secondary teachers will be required



to demonstrate, through coursework, state testing, or advanced credentialing, a high level of competency in each of the academic subjects they will teach. In the context of this mandate, administrators understandably stress content knowledge.

These aspiring principals also pointed to ongoing professional growth and teamwork; that teachers should assume an active role in this collective endeavor. As you enter your new school, show a willingness to learn. Cooperate with your colleagues and the administration.

See yourself as a contributing team player who possesses essential social skills.

The group also listed flexibility, good communication, and organizational skills. You must be the instructional leader in your classroom;

you should also serve as an active member of the school community and join in meeting educational goals. You are part of a professional learning community. At all times, ask yourself, “Am I doing what is best for my students?”

The answers may not always be obvious, but a strong knowledge of content matter and a disposition for collaborative professional growth will benefit you and your students. ■

Rate Yourself!

1. Content Knowledge
2. Ongoing Professional Growth
3. Teamwork
4. Flexibility
5. Good Communication
6. Organizational Skills



Jorge Correa is an Assistant Professor at the Charter School of Education and Human Sciences at Berry College in Mt. Berry, Georgia.