



7 Learning Zones Every Classroom Must Have

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Here to help you save time, gain praise, and reduce stress.

There are many elements to consider as you plan for the next school year. You always review critical pieces like standards, curriculum, instructional activities, and testing, but you also think about the classroom space and how to arrange desks, set up bulletin boards, and organize materials. You can bring these seemingly disconnected components together in a system of seven learning zones. The discovery, news, supplies, community, quiet, teacher, and subject area zones will help you establish routines, save time, and maintain your sanity from the first through the last days of school.

1. Discovery Zone

The discovery zone houses all those items that spark imagination. These include arts and crafts materials, manipulatives, recorders, cameras, music makers, games, puzzles, and fun books and magazines. Share samples of different projects so that students have a jumping off point. You can harness all of this creativity by giving the students a central concept to explore. Have them draw what they see, list observations, and write down their questions. Use this data to inform your instructional strategies and design your lesson plans.

2. News Zone

The news zone will help you manage your classroom calendar, assignments and projects, school-wide events, holidays, upcoming celebrations, weather, temperature, and community and world news. You can also use this space to list your daily learning target, classwork, writing and discussion prompts, and homework. Designate a section for students to share either personal or classroom-related updates.

3. Supplies Zone

The supplies zone is sure to save your sanity. Here is where you provide pencils, pens, highlighters, sharpeners, staplers, scissors, hole punchers, rulers, paper, glue, tape, paperclips, tissue, paper towels, hand sanitizer, a trash can, and general tools. Use this space for reference materials like formula and vocabulary charts, cheat sheets, study guides, manuals, textbooks, clipboards, and spirals or journals. This can also be the hub for turning in classwork or homework, and for storing graded work or portfolios. Provide a lost and found box to help with cleanup and reinforce good citizenship.



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4. Community Zone

A community zone serves multiple purposes. Students are reminded that we are all working toward common goals. It provides time to discuss what was learned, make connections, pose questions, present other perspectives, and engage in reflection. These discussions are an opportunity for you to evaluate progress, clarify information, address misconceptions, and take notes to plan ahead. At the start of the year you will lead the discussions, but students should be guided until they can open, facilitate, and close the meetings. It is helpful to define the zone and include the meeting time in your

schedule. You can use an area rug to anchor the space and give several students a place to sit. Other students can remain standing or bring in their chairs.

5. Quiet Zone

Sharing the classroom space with 20 or more other kids isn't always easy. Some students naturally prefer to work alone, while others simply need a quiet zone to catch up on work, study, read, write, take a test, or reflect. A spare table and chairs in a corner of your room can be used to define the zone. If possible, provide some earphones to help filter out classroom noise. Use study carrels to block visual distractions.

6. Teacher Zone

The teacher zone serves as your little oasis away from home, but it also helps you manage all of your professional responsibilities. Use the space to nurture your spirit by displaying photos of family, friends, pets, and vacations. Frame or pin up a few precious notes and small gifts from your past and present students. If you don't have a desk, then make sure you have a secure cabinet to store your handbag, keys, valuables, medication, and other personal items. This zone is also your professional space where you plan, prepare, grade, analyze data, and complete your reports. It houses your teacher's manuals, references, and charts. You will also use this area to work on confidential records like grades, test data, student modifications, and cumulative files. You can use it as a private space to host one-to-one conferences with your students. Be sure to display your credentials like degrees, teaching certification, and key professional development certificates. These credentials and a pair of adult-sized chairs will set the business tone when parents, colleagues, or administrators visit your room.

7. Subject Area Zone

The subject area zone houses the worksheets, resources, manipulatives, games, and tech tools for the subjects you teach. It's important to also display how subjects interconnect, because too many students have a difficult time relating subject matter to other disciplines. Tools and manipulatives should be moved from closets, storage bins, or cabinets and placed in this zone. Provide anchor charts with key ideas and strategies, flashcards, study notes, key people in the field, timelines, and a variety of print materials. Upgrade your word wall by adding visuals and real objects. Organize vocabulary alphabetically or by concept or story -- the key is to provide context for each term. Define the zone with a header, comfortable seating, and even stuffed study buddies.

(<http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/blogs/edutopia-lopez-7classroom-learning-zones.pdf>)

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How do you organize your classroom space? Please tell us about it in the comments.

Redesign Your Classroom Space

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