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Congratulations, you're past the biggest hurdle—being hired. Your next challenge is new teacher orientation and all of its information to digest. I know because, in the last five years, I've been a new teacher in a new building four different times. As a veteran of various new teacher orientations, I'd like to pass along a few tips on getting the most out of these introductions to the profession.

Each district has its own spin on orientation. Some take a day only, while others last for weeks (yes, weeks). Most are long and boring. You'll probably tend to daydream about your classroom. Curb those thoughts on poster placement and desk arrangements, however, and listen. There is valuable information to be learned.

Teacher handbook. Administrators usually run through the teacher handbook and highlight contract information. Being aware of your employee responsibilities and knowing basics about your building will be important throughout the year, so keep that teacher handbook handy. From an explanation of the school's crisis plan

and phone procedures to a copy of building layouts and the school calendar—it's in there. You'll turn to your handbook when you prepare for a substitute or learn specific procedures for a fire drill.

Insurance. Full-time employees receive information about insurance coverage. If you are getting your own insurance for the first time, then pay close attention. Health, dental, and life insurance can be mind-boggling—especially when coupled with the stress of starting a new job. Do you know the difference between an HMO and a PPO? I didn't, and the presenter sped through the insurance information, only pointing out papers to be signed. If your head begins to spin, ask whether you can take the paperwork home to weigh your options. If it must be filled



Surviving New T

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out then, get your questions answered. Either way, don't leave the session until you have clarity and the speaker's name and contact information for questions that may arise.

Secretaries and custodians. You may meet the secretaries and custodians during orientation. If not, introduce yourself to them as soon as possible. They are the most important staff members in your building. To purchase a classroom item, fix the copy machine that you've jammed, or clean a mess in your room, you'll turn to these school personnel. Get to know them and don't forget them during holidays. Small tokens of appreciation go far.

Other new teachers. At orientation, you'll also meet significant peers—other new teachers. Connect with them to develop a support system that can help you get through the year, whether you're fresh out of school or an experienced new teacher. My first year of teaching, I was the youngest person in my building by at least six years. It was challenging to find someone who readily related to what I was going through.

for the process, as does being flexible and ready for the unexpected. The evaluation is a lengthy and tedious form for administrators to complete and vital for you to understand.

Important teaching strategies. Last, but not least, pay attention to the content material presented at orientation. Though it may repeat information you know well, it advises you on the specific educational focus of your school district as well as any particular teaching techniques you'll be expected to follow. A specific focus often denotes that the district didn't meet its goals for a particular testing area. Regardless of your opinion on standardized testing, in the public education system, test scores are essential. Therefore, you will be evaluated on implementing that focus, whether planning block scheduling, a special math program, or curriculum content. Understand that focus from day one to avoid wondering down the road how to set up a science experiment or grade writing assessments.

Having been a new teacher in a new school often and



Teacher ORIENTATION

Veteran teachers often seem to have forgotten the new teacher experience. At times, advice or suggestions are needed; other times, venting or validation. Empathy and support from other new teachers is invaluable.

Teacher evaluation process. Your district's teacher evaluation procedure will be covered at this time. Again, each district is different. You may have anywhere from one to five formal evaluations during the year and countless informal observations—planned or by surprise. I taught at one school where all observations were unannounced and carried out by a district administrator; another school conducted scheduled evaluations by the principal. Knowing exactly what your administrators look for during evaluations helps prepare you

recently, I know well the tremendous amount of time and energy being a new teacher takes. I also know the worth of repeated first-year performances. The experiences and rewarding moments gained were invaluable. My résumé boasts a variety of training sessions as well as accomplishments from diverse teaching environments. Most of all, I've had the privilege of working with many wonderful colleagues. That's how I know that, in the end, you determine what you get out of any new teacher orientation. ■



Melissa Pierzynski
taught in Cicero and Westmont, Illinois, and now teaches 8th-grade communication arts at the Rockwood School District in Wildwood, Missouri.