

PLC Notes

Lesson 1.1: Getting to Know You

PLC Notes are written by R. Keeth Matheny, School-Connect co-author and high school teacher (Austin, TX) to create a professional learning community for School-Connect teachers.

Dear Dedicated Difference Makers,

Welcome S-C teachers from across the US. I am so very impressed with the talent and dedication of the School-Connect teachers I've met across the country. It is clear that someone has done an awesome job selecting the right teachers for this subject.

Each week I will send out PLC notes to S-C teachers who have attended S-C trainings then add the notes to the iPortal. I'll write about what I'm doing this week in my class and include additional resources, extension activities and some miscellaneous materials. It works best if you have read the lesson before you read the PLC notes because I reference many of the lesson activities.

After teaching, if you have any ideas to add or questions PLEASE forward them to me (coachrudy@me.com) and I will pass them along. I LOVE to hear good stories and suggestions.

Why we do what we do. This work is so critical to students. They are in a very challenging phase of life and making a difficult transition. All students need social and emotional learning (SEL) skills, and there is major data that supports its positive impact. In particular, freshman year is critical: A large percentage of students who fail ninth grade end up dropping out. However, if freshmen get off to the right start with some organizational skills and connections to a caring adult, a positive peer group, and a goal beyond high school, then that momentum can carry them to an excellent high school career and beyond. I believe strongly that this course, and you the teachers, are the keys to making it happen. The ripple effects of what you will be doing for others will reach far and wide and will deeply affect even your students' children and beyond.

Creating the space. I am excited for the start of a new year. I get my "adoption papers" tomorrow as I receive my class rosters and prepare to meet my new children. I have been setting up my room and feel this is my best classroom ever. I set the desks up in pods of four for small group activities. My main goal tomorrow is to make every student feel welcome, teach some procedures, give them a fun first taste of the class, and make some relationship deposits! I have attached a few photos from my classroom. Fun stuff.

Lesson tips. I print Handout 1.1.1 on cardstock and have students fill it out and then fold the handout to make a table tent. Ask them to do a little decorating and write their first name and an adjective using the same sound before it (alliteration). *Examples: Creative Keeth, Caring Caroline, Joking Judy*, etc. Students will bring the table tents with them as they change groups for the first few weeks of school and will keep them in the classroom.

I use the table tents to help everyone learn names for the first few weeks. The adjective just makes it easier to remember and adds a little personality. I take a picture of each three/four person group of students with their table tents up and use it on my phone to memorize names. I love to see how

fast I can learn every student's name. By the way, this is a huge relationship deposit and has a major impact on class climate.

One tip I find useful is to talk about content a little between each rotation and group share. This way they have something to focus on before switching again. Our first day is very short so my first lesson spans two days.

I do not want to go too far into the School-Connect materials because some students' schedules will get shuffled. So I give them longer to share each favorite thing on the Bell Ringer and we extend all discussions. I also spend a good amount of time talking about the class syllabus, procedures, attention signals, etc.

The Reflection/Application assignment (aka homework) asks students to conduct "frienterviews" of other freshmen. This gives students an excuse to meet new people. The questions are: *What is your name? What middle school did you come from* (since I teach freshman seminar)? *What are some things you like to do?* I tell them to try to find an interest or activity they both have in common and to try for more unique interests. In fact, I like to give a prize (school materials, candy) to the students who have a number of rare things in common. I also give a prize for the most frienterviews completed by the end of the first two weeks. I hope this exercise will make all freshman feel more welcomed and improve the overall school climate.

Remember, the first week will really set the stage for the entire year: Greet at the door and make each student feel you are glad to see them – it takes a long time to correct a bad first impression with a new student.

I am so sincerely thankful your students have you. Thank you for making a difference!

Inspired and eager to help,

R. Keeth Matheny
Austin High School Teacher
and School-Connect Co-Author

Setting up my classroom . . .

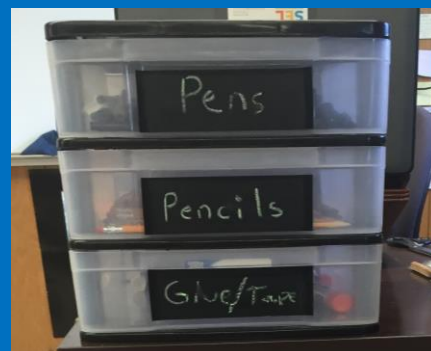


Desks in groups of four to facilitate small group activities and think-pair-shares. Alternate arrangement below for large class size.

Found a "basketball wastebasket" for "snowball" activities in upcoming lessons! (Search online.)



College pennants all around the room



Plenty of supplies for borrowing