

least twenty minutes or more for them to work on the assignment, and they barely had five minutes. I need to find an efficient, more controlled way of moving from one part of the lesson to the next. I also know I need to be more prepared for lessons prior to them starting.” *She’s not sure what went wrong? But we’ve discussed these issues so many times!*

With an inner sigh of despair I ask, “Do you have any ideas on how you can pick up the pace of your lessons and have quicker transitions between activities? If not, I have some ideas.”

Sarah seems to understand what she needs to work on, and I share some ideas on how to solve her slow pacing. Sarah chooses to use a timer throughout her lesson to help keep her on track. This is progress. She also agrees to ignore students’ little behaviors and deal with their big behaviors in a quick, concise manner at an appropriate time. For the next few weeks, we work on this together and I feel like she is finally “getting it.” Then, I pass by her classroom and take a peak through the window. No way! Kids are everywhere and she is back to her same bad habits. I don’t have time for this. I am giving her four times more help than I am my other three new teachers. *Is she not taking this seriously? Does she truly understand that if she does not make measurable progress the school will not renew her contract? If she is not going to take this seriously, why am I so worried about it?*

I continue to work with Sarah on a weekly basis throughout the school year. Our work together is like traveling over hills and through valleys. In one class, her teaching looks good. In the next class, the quality of her teaching plummets, the kids go wild, and she stops trying. She never achieves the day-to-day consistency that is the hallmark of good teaching. While failure is not a word I like to use, with Sarah I am almost willing to admit defeat. *But do I have permission to give up? Isn’t my job to help her be successful? Will I be responsible if she doesn’t make it? How can I save this situation? How can I rescue Sarah if she doesn’t seem to want to save herself?*

## Questions for discussion

1. Over the course of the year, how does a mentor adjust the balance of responsibility for helping a new teacher be successful?
2. What does a mentor do when a new teacher cannot consistently demonstrate successful practices?
3. How much support is enough?

END 

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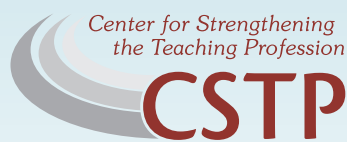
## Notes:

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Funding for NTA  
provided by the  
Paul G. Allen Family Foundation



# NEW TEACHER SUPPORT

The three other new teachers are doing just fine. Why is Sarah’s classroom management not improving?

## WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

*Barb Moses*

It’s 10:25 in the morning, as I walk into Sarah’s second grade classroom to observe her math lesson. Most of the students are out of their seats and Jason yells to Matt, “Can I borrow your basketball for lunch recess?” Three girls are giggling at the whiteboard while drawing hearts and a group of rowdy boys have decided to make pencil sharpening a cross between a social activity and a game of human bumper cars. I wonder, *What happened to teaching math? Why is Sarah not making these students behave? Have all of our mentor/mentee discussions on classroom management been for nothing?*

Eventually, I hear Sarah’s faint, sweet voice in the background. “Boys and girls, you are too noisy—do you think you can go to your desks and sit quietly for the next direction?” Nothing changes. No one returns to their seats. They continue to visit with their classmates, draw pictures on their folders, and completely ignore their teacher’s directions. Sarah is looking for her teacher’s manual, getting a wet paper towel for the overhead, and collecting her pens. It is as if she has retreated into her own world, far from the noisy reality of the classroom. This is going to be a long observation.

I come to mentoring with 16 years of teaching under my belt, as well as two years as a district-wide instructional coach. While my office is located in Sarah’s elementary school, my coaching job requires me to be in all the schools throughout the district. Although I’m often on the road visiting schools, as the only trained mentor in the building I felt obligated to take on the school’s four new teachers in addition to my main job. This is a lot, but taking into account my mentoring successes in the past, I agreed to the four-person caseload. Now I’m reconsidering that decision. *What was I thinking? How can I be an effective mentor when I am not in the building all the time?*

Sarah is now on probation due to her lack of classroom management skills. If she does not demonstrate the ability to keep her class under control, she is going to lose her job at the end of the year. I have had several meetings with Sarah. I have spent a lot of time in her classroom modeling techniques for her and observing, and she and I have had what I thought were great learning-focused conversations about effective classroom management techniques. As I think about all of the work we’ve done together, I can’t imagine what other strategies I could try. I’m also wrestling with a terrible sense of failure. *The three other new teachers are doing just fine. Why is Sarah’s classroom management not improving? Am I doing something wrong? What more can I do for her?*

Sarah appears to have her materials in place, but now the students’ questions start: “Can I go to the bathroom?” “What is for lunch today?” “Can I stay in the classroom

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instead of going out to lunch recess?” Eventually I hear that same sweet voice quietly say, “Boys and girls, nobody is going to their seats. I need you in your seats so that we can get started with math.” None of the children respond to Sarah. *Does she not see all the behavior problems occurring in this classroom? Should I step in and take over to regain some control in this classroom before more time is wasted?* At 10:45, the math lesson finally begins.

Enough is enough! The children are not learning, and Sarah is in serious trouble. If I don’t find a way to help her, I know that she will lose her job and I know that I will feel that I have failed her. For the past four months, Sarah has been fighting to keep control of her class. During my observations, I’ve seen her struggle with classroom management problems time and time again, and today her actions make it clear that she is losing the battle. The building principal, the literacy coach, and I are all helping her. The literacy coach visits Sarah’s classroom at least twice a week and provides the same kinds of modeling, co-teaching, observation, and feedback support that I do. The principal also works with Sarah in her classroom. All of us—“Team Sarah”—are working hard at this, but Sarah’s classroom management issues remain. I continue to observe the lesson thinking there must be a key to this problem somewhere.

The conversations and activities I see and hear are clearly not about math, and the students are ignoring Sarah. After finishing her brief lesson using the overhead, Sarah calls the students up to the rug. Instant chaos!

“Hey Xavier, wanna look at my new notebook?”

“How many marbles did you win this morning?”

“What are you doing after school? Wanna come over to my house?”

“Quit pushing me! Leave me alone!”

In the meantime, the students go the roundabout way to the rug, passing their buddies’ desks, pushing, shoving, grabbing at each other, and eventually landing on the rug. Sarah takes a drink of coffee, sits on the rug, and waits for the students to arrive. Once the students all show up, it is clear that their rug behaviors aren’t any better. They sprawl out, lie down on their backs, and roll around on their stomachs kicking their legs. In vain, I wait for Sarah to take charge. *Is she ever going to make these children toe the line and behave?*

Finally, I hear that same faint, sweet voice saying, “Boys and girls, please sit up on the rug and look at me. We need to get on with this math lesson.” Only a handful listens to her and does what she asks. Sarah stops and says “I’m waiting.” Then, I’m happy to see that she sits and waits. *Oh good! She is going to hold them to some sort of expectations!* But, I’m wrong. Soon, she grows tired of waiting and she continues the lesson as the students stay wildly off task, thrashing around on the carpet and chatting with each other.

This is Sarah’s second year of teaching, but her first year teaching second grade. She completed her student teaching and her first year of teaching at the secondary level, and teaching second grade is a big stretch. She consistently remarks how second grade is very different than she thought it would be.

## Notes:

I am Sarah’s “official” mentor and yet I’m wondering if I am doing her any good. Due to my coaching responsibilities, I can only work with her three times a week. I believe that it is my mentoring responsibility to be in her classroom guiding her daily until she has a firm grasp on her classroom management. It is obvious that the situation is worse when I am not in the room. Ugh! I have never had a new teacher fail, and I don’t want to ruin that record or my reputation. *How am I going to rescue Sarah?*

Solving classroom management issues should be a fundamental skill for an effective mentor, but in this situation it has become an insurmountable problem for me. When I model effective classroom management techniques for Sarah, I demonstrate how to hold students accountable for their learning. Together, as we team teach lessons side by side, we maintain high levels of control and student accountability. I know that Sarah can see the benefit of the approaches I share with her, and she often appears to be right on the verge of mastering the approaches. Just when I allow myself to feel encouraged that Sarah is gaining ground, however, I visit her classroom and find out that she is right back where we started. Nothing seems to be working.

I pick up my observation data and leave Sarah’s classroom, knowing that I will be back after school to discuss the lesson with Sarah and dreading it a little. *We have had this conversation so many times. I just don’t know where I am going to start and what I can say or do differently to help her save her job. But I have to try.*

The end of the school day arrives quickly. I head back to Sarah’s classroom, and we sit down at the front of the room with cups of coffee and notepads. I share my observation data with her, and after she reviews my comments we begin one more learning-focused conversation. I feel that a great deal is riding on my question as I ask, “In looking at the observation data, did you see anything that jumps out at you?”

“Yes,” Sarah responds, in a small, sad voice, “I saw lots of things. It is really obvious that this group of girls and these two boys were off task throughout most of the lesson. I also see that the majority of the students were off task for almost a third of my whole lesson.” *Once again, Sarah sees the problem, too. But, can we find a solution this time?*

“I agree with you,” I say warmly, “and I’m glad you picked up on those things. You know, Sarah, you and I have talked about several strategies you can use to help students stay on task. Do you remember any of those strategies?”

“Well,” Sarah slowly replies, “I know we have talked about my pacing and how a well-paced lesson helps hold the students’ attention because the lesson is not long and drawn out. We have also talked about setting my expectations and making them clear to students, holding students accountable, rapid transitions, following routines, and being consistent with them.”

“Those are all good strategies and best practices for successful teaching,” I say, trying to summon more enthusiasm than I feel, “and, as you and I know, the bottom line is that if students aren’t spending time working, they aren’t learning! What do you think went wrong today?”

“Hmm,” Sarah ponders, “I am not sure, but I think I would say my pacing and transitions. The lesson took way longer than I planned. I thought there would be at

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