



Make sure your room is well-organized, looks inviting and features student work.

Union course offers open house tips

One of the most often-requested seminars offered by the union's Education & Learning Trust is "Parent-Teacher Conference: Strategies for Success."

In the two-hour session, veteran-teacher instructors cover strategies and tips, including creating an effective environment and gathering documents for meetings with parents. For more information contact the Trust at ELTmail@nysutmail.org.

If you are interested in having an ELT seminar in your area, ask your local union president to schedule one by calling ELT in Latham at 800-528-6208.



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FOR TEACHERS

Back-to-school night

Tips for getting off
to a good start

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You're not alone.

If you're a little nervous about that upcoming "Back to School" night or "Open House," you're not alone.

New teachers call it one of the scariest parts of their new career.

Truth be told, even some of the most accomplished teachers find it challenging.

"I've been doing it more than 20 years and I still can't eat dinner that night," confessed one longtime Long Island teacher. "It's one thing to deal with the kids. It's quite another to face a roomful of parents."

Maria Neira, NYSUT vice president, says it's important to view the "back-to-school" night for what it is: a fresh start and a perfect way to kick off a productive and enjoyable year. It probably will be the first contact you have with many parents. If you teach at the secondary level, it may be the only contact you have with them.

New York Teacher interviewed several experienced classroom teachers, including ELT instructors, for their strategies on how to make the evening a win/win situation for you and the parents. Here are some suggestions to keep in mind.



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Send out invitations; let students help prepare.

Enlist your students to help you prepare displays, select work for folders, write a short note to their parents, or act as hallway hosts during the open house. ELT instructor Donna Christmas, a longtime science teacher at South Colonie Middle School (near Albany), says teachers there work in teams to personally call and invite parents. Others boost attendance by sending personal invitations or postcards hand-addressed by students. Some districts arrange for older students to offer babysitting so more parents can come.

Don't 'wing it.'

Rehearse what you'll say. Practice an opening and a closing — many people don't do that. Prepare an outline or checklist of areas you want to cover. Plan how you'll keep track of time. Elementary teacher Julie Burnetter, a member of the Shenendehowa TA in Saratoga County, plays soft background music, and when the tape goes off, she knows she has five minutes to wrap up. If you're limited to 10-15 minutes, be sure to time yourself at home.

Meet parents at the door.

Don't sit at your desk. Make parents feel welcome — be sure to thank them for coming, use a warm voice, make eye contact and remember to smile. To add a personal touch, you might display "day in the life" snapshots or make a video showing students at work in the classroom.

Outline your goals.

This is the perfect opportunity to explain your policies and expectations. Jay Krass, a teacher in North Salem, Westchester County, suggests explaining the curriculum and major themes, plus your expectations for homework, attendance and behavior.

Recruit parental support.

Be sure to remind parents their support and involvement is important. This is a great time to recruit volunteers for various activities and schedule parent-teacher conferences, if applicable. Have sign-up sheets available. This will save you time later.

Allow time for questions. Discourage 'personal conferences.'

Give parents a chance to ask general questions but be sure to firmly say "tonight is not the time for personal conversations about your child." Kindly explain you're still getting to know the kids — and tell parents the best way and time you can be reached to discuss any individual concerns. This avoids that huge line-up of parents at the end of the evening!

Give parents something to take home.

Be selective, whether it's a brief course outline, general district information or a union brochure on how to help children with reading. Several teachers suggested sending a follow-up letter to all parents, including those who were not able to attend.

