

# SEPTEMBER

## BEGINNING THE SCHOOL YEAR SUCCESSFULLY

*Creating a Community of Learners in the Classroom*

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. How do I create a community of learners in my classroom? The **Relationship ACTIVITIES** provide ways to approach this task.
2. How will I learn how to implement routines in my classroom? The **Routines ACTIVITIES** offer you ideas to discuss with your mentor.
3. How will I learn ways to implement classroom and behavior management routines and look at student work systematically? Use the **Student ACTIVITIES** as a way to begin to focus on these topics.
4. How will I reach out to parents? Use the **Communication ACTIVITY** as a way to focus on ways to connect with parents and families.

### Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium—InTASC Standards

This month will focus on InTASC Standards 1 and 2. Discuss these with your mentor.

For the complete list of standards go to page 5 in Part I of this book.

- **Standard 1 Learner Development**

The teacher understands how learners grow and develop, recognizing that patterns of learning and development vary individually within and across the cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical areas, and designs and implements developmentally appropriate and challenging learning experiences.

- **Standard 2 Learning Differences**

The teacher uses understanding of individual differences and diverse cultures and communities to ensure inclusive learning environments that enable each learner to meet high standards.

## Chapter Overview

A wise person once said, “*Wisdom is not knowing what to do ultimately; it is knowing what to do next.*” As a novice teacher, you will work with a mentor and perhaps a small group of novice teachers in your school or district. You need to be open to building relationships with not only your students but your colleagues as well. Some of the teachers will be informally assisting you, and others may be paid to help you set up your first classroom. If you have an assigned official mentor, it is your responsibility to work to create a positive and trusting relationship. The mentor will be working to do the same. Be open to learning new ideas and ways to approach the school year. You don’t have to copy everything your mentor does, but you should be open to listening and asking questions about why she or he approaches her or his school year a certain way.

Each novice teacher in the school will have different needs based on their previous experiences and teacher preparation. What do you need? How can you minimize the anxiety you are feeling in September so that you can maximize student learning in your classroom this month?

As a beginning teacher, you must have conversations with your mentor that relate to building student learning communities in the classroom. Relationships with students are crucial to your success in the classroom. Students are disruptive if they are bored or if they feel the teacher doesn’t know them. By relating to students, you can maximize student learning and minimize disruptions in your classroom.

Your mentor serves as a guide, but she will not be telling you what to do. She can offer suggestions, and you can try ideas, but ultimately it is your decision to choose what works best in your classroom. You will have questions, emotional ups and downs, and lots of ideas you want to try out this month and this year. Listen to the many ways your mentors and colleagues plan for the opening of school and explore the options with them. Mentoring is not about someone *telling* you what to do; it is about *creating* opportunities where you can discover what to do in your own classroom. It is also okay to follow exactly what your mentor is doing this month. After all, you are just getting started; you may not know what to do.

Learn to listen to what your mentor says and ask questions. Trust yourself and be honest about what you feel is right for your classroom. Your affirmation this month is, “I ask for what I need to be successful.” Think about how it feels to ask for help and recognize that it is okay to get help.

Follow the PLAN, CONNECT, ACT, REFLECT, and SET GOALS sections in this chapter to guide your mentoring conversations with your mentor and your personal reflections in your Novice Teacher Journal. Watch and listen to a mentor share her insights in Video 2.6, *Mentoring in Action: September Chapter Introduction*, on the companion website or scan the QR code on a mobile device.

### VIDEO 2.6



Mentoring in Action:  
September Chapter  
Introduction



### Novice Teacher Journal

One way to plan your month is to assess where you are right now. Writing in your Novice Teacher Journal will help you document what you are feeling and how to focus your teaching. A digital version of the journal is available on the companion website.

**Directions:** Review the chapter cover page and the overview for this month. How do this month's topic, the quotes, phase, and affirmation, relate to you right now? How are you feeling as you prepare for the school year to begin? What do you feel confident about? Where do you need some help?

Use your journal to record your thoughts, feelings, and questions in a free-flowing narrative. This page is for your personal reflection; it does not need to be shared with your mentor unless you choose to do so. At the end of the year, you can review your monthly reflections to see how much you have grown.

September Entry Date \_\_\_\_\_

Today I feel . . .

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I am confident in the areas of . . .

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I need some help . . .

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## Questions for Participating in Mentoring Conversations

Sometimes you don't know what to ask your mentor because you don't know what you don't know! Review this list and choose some questions that are useful to you. How will your mentor respond? Will you schedule a face-to-face meeting, a phone appointment, or send an e-mail? What works best for both of you? Reflect on your mentor's responses and think about what works for you. If you are a 2+ year teacher, these may not all apply to you; however, there may be a question you would like to revisit.

### *Your Possible Questions*

1. How do students learn at this grade level?
  - How many of my students need support in English language learning, and what should I do to help them integrate socially and academically?
  - Can you share some successful ways for setting up a classroom in September?
  - What are self-motivating strategies for students?
  - What do I do if a student misbehaves?

Other questions I have . . .

### *Anticipate Your Mentor's Questions*

1. What is your understanding of child/adolescent development?
2. For which grade level did you complete your student teaching?
3. How confident are you at this time?
4. What can I do to assist you right now to minimize your anxiety?

### Meetings and Observations

Plan brief weekly meetings with your mentor. The ACTs in this chapter serve as mentoring conversation starters and can also be used to assess or review what you may already know about a given topic.

Plan to meet at times that allow you to have quality time together in a place without interruptions. Use this calendar to schedule your meetings and classroom visits to ensure they will happen! Include watching videos or reading pages in *The First Years Matter* as part of your *PLAN*. A digital version of this calendar (September Calendar.pdf) is available on the companion website.

Invite your mentor to visit your classroom. A before school or after school visit is an opportunity for you to share how the room is organized as well to show and tell your mentor what you have done so far. Schedule this visit early to be sure it happens.



### September Calendar

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY

Use this calendar to *PLAN* the month with your mentor as well as to document meetings.



## CONNECT to Additional Resources

### CONNECT to School and District Resources

What resources exist in your school and community that could assist you in beginning the school year successfully?

### CONNECT With Colleagues and Parents

Who are the teachers you want to know? Ask your mentor to introduce you.

Who or what agency in the community could provide resources or support for no or low cost?

How will you learn about any nontraditional family models that may exist within your school and district? (e.g., grandparents, single mothers or fathers, legal guardians, same gender parents, etc.)

### CONNECT to Student Voices

How are students showing up in your classroom? When your mentor walks into your classroom, what evidence of students will he see? Are their names on the walls, photos posted, or student work displayed on the wall of fame? Seeing students “in the room” when they are not physically in the room demonstrates the visible mark that students have in the classroom. Discuss this important topic with your mentor, using the form titled, “How Do Students *Show Up* in the Classroom?” available on the companion website.

### CONNECT to Education Hot Topics

*Organize your space!* As you organize your classroom, discuss the ways the space can be used most effectively. Search for online tips such as “easy ways to make your space work for you and your students.” Explore articles online to find out how wall color, lighting, and eliminating clutter influence the classroom environment. Share what you find with your mentor.

### CONNECT With the Companion Website

Video links, forms for this chapter, a featured book and other resources by the author are located at [resources.corwin.com/mentoringinaction](https://resources.corwin.com/mentoringinaction)



## The First ACT!

### *Differentiating Mentoring Conversations*

Teaching is complex work, and you can easily become overwhelmed. It is appropriate to customize your mentoring conversations so that your mentor is responding to your needs and skills.

**Directions:** Discuss the prompts with your mentor or think about them on your own. Refer to your state or district teaching standards to note a common language for teaching and summarize your key ideas in each box. Skim the ACTs for this month and decide which topics are most relevant to your needs this month.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Monthly Needs Assessment

<p>1. What is going well in your classroom right now?</p>	<p>3. What would you like to improve or enhance in your practice this month?</p>
<p>2. How do you know your practice is working? What is your evidence of success?</p>	<p>4. Review the ACT overview of possible conversations for this month with your mentor. What would you like to focus on this month?</p>

A digital version of this template (Monthly Needs Assessment Sample With Standards.pdf) is available on the companion website. Keep a copy of this assessment in your professional file.



### Overview of the ACTs for September Conversations

**Directions:** Skim the ACTivities listed here and complete the pages that will forward your learning. If you are a 2+ year teacher, revisit any ACTs you already completed or try some new ACTs to stretch your thinking. Digital copies of some of the ACTs are available on the companion website.

SEPTEMBER

Key Question Topic	ACTivities	PAGE
Relationship	ACT 1 <b>Creating a Community of Learners in the Classroom</b>	53
Relationship	ACT 2 <b>Getting to Know the Students</b>	54
Relationship	ACT 3 <b>Creating a Classroom Profile</b>	55
Relationship	ACT 4 <b>Learning How Students Learn</b>	56
Routines	ACT 5 <b>Establishing and Implementing Routines</b>	57
Routines	ACT 6 <b>Rules, Rewards, and Consequences</b>	58
Routines	ACT 7 <b>Learning School Procedures</b>	59
Students	ACT 8 <b>Classroom and Behavior Management Issues</b>	60
Students	ACT 9 <b>Looking at Student Work Together</b>	61
Communication	ACT 10 <b>Communicating With Parents</b>	62



## Creating a Community of Learners in the Classroom

**Key Question:** What should you review about building a learning community?

**Directions:** Review the list of ideas on this page and choose the topics that are most relevant to your learning. Discuss your ideas with your mentor.

1. How does an effective teacher include students of other cultures in the community?
2. What does respect look like in the classroom, and how does a novice teacher create a respectful classroom?
3. Invite your mentor to share what she knows about team building and student communities.
4. How can student sharing create a safe and respectful classroom? Discuss this idea. Start the day or class with five minutes of student sharing time. Rationale: Students come to school with lots of issues related to their personal lives. Getting to know each other, learning how to listen, and respecting the lives of others can enhance a classroom community.
5. How can student partners help to build a spirit of teamwork? Discuss this idea. Allow students to work together, sit together, and support each other in learning. Rationale: Students want to talk to each other. By trying to keep them quiet all day, we attempt an impossible task. Letting students talk to a partner allows them to release energy and stay on task. By organizing sharing partners, novice teachers can structure student talking time and use it to create a sharing classroom. For example, when a student is absent, his or her partner can collect all the work and share.
6. How can learning teams and small groups make school more engaging for students who want to interact? Teams can work on projects, create team slogans, and challenge each other in academic contests. Why is it important to rotate teams periodically? Rationale: Teamwork is more fun for some students and teaches students how to work together to achieve learning goals.
7. How can student compliments encourage kindness? Students who give each other compliments at the end of the day as part of the teacher's routine feel good when they leave school and want to come back the next day. Rationale for this activity: Everyone likes to hear that his classmates notice what he is doing to build a community in the classroom. Discuss how the teacher has to model the compliment process by giving compliments to students. Positive words create caring communities.



## Getting to Know the Students

**Key Question:** How can you learn about your students?

**Directions:** Listening to students, understanding their needs, and responding to their suggestions are important ways to build relationships in the classroom. Many beginning teachers make the mistake of being a friend to students and then have difficulty being a teacher later in the year. Use the ideas on this page to discuss practical ways to survey your students. Ask your students to complete any of these with short answers. A digital version can be found on the companion website. Share the results with your mentor and what you learned by doing this.

### Student Interest Survey

#### Sample Questions:

- What do you like most about school?
- What do you think your strengths are in the classroom?
- How do you learn best?
- What is your favorite subject? Why?
- What language do you speak at home?
- Have you ever traveled to another country?
- What could I help you learn this year?
- What do you wish you could do in school?
- What is your favorite sport or hobby?
- Do you play a musical instrument?

Adapt questions to meet the needs and ages of students. You may need to read the questions to younger children and write their answers on the board, or students can circle a smiley or frown face to express their opinion.

1. *Option:* Select a question and have students write the answers on an index card. Make sure students write their names on the cards!
2. *Take photographs of each student.* Students love it, and it will help you learn their names and faces. This may be more appropriate for younger students. A whole-class photograph is fun for all age groups.
3. *Interview a few students.* Ask them to talk about their experiences in school and share how they best learn. You can assist your novice teacher in documenting the responses using audio features on phones or tablets. Be sure to get permission from students and parents.
4. *What are your ideas for getting to know your students?*





### Learning How Students Learn

**Key Question:** How do you discover your students' learning preferences?

**Directions:** Being able to recognize the variety of learning styles will assist you in designing effective lessons and engaging students in the learning process.

Think about your preferred teaching style and how it relates to preferred learning styles of your students.

Create a survey or interview your students to find out their learning preferences. Integrate these options into your lesson plans to engage more students. At a mentoring meeting, be prepared to discuss your answers to the questions on this form. A digital version is available on the companion website.

#### Class Overview of Learning Preferences

I learn best by . . .	List the names of the students in your class who prefer each learning method
Listening to the teacher, an audio book, or other hearing formats	
Seeing a visual diagram, map, agenda, or other visual formats.	
Using manipulatives, blocks, building models, or other tactile objects.	
Writing essays, paper and pencil, or computer typing	
Writing poetry, songs, or raps	
Singing songs and performing	
Debating, interviewing, and presenting information	
Producing videos	
Reading text in books or on the computer	
Drawing, painting, making diagrams, or making charts	
Using the web to research and find answers	
Acting, dramatization, role playing	
Ask your students to respond to these two prompts	Names of students
1. I prefer to work in groups with other students.	
2. I prefer to learn alone.	



## Establishing and Implementing Routines

**Key Question:** Why is it important to discuss routines with your mentor?

**Directions:** Routines are important for maintaining consistency and moving through a teaching day in a predictable manner so that students know what to expect. Establishing routines can save valuable time and energy that can be put into academic areas. Discuss these sample routines listed here and review the questions at the end of the page. Create workable routines in your classroom.

1. ***Routines at the beginning of the day or beginning of a class***
  - Attendance and how to handle students who are absent so they get make up work
  - Lunch count
  - Collecting homework and recording it
2. ***Procedures for students' moving***
  - Walking to classes or in the classroom
  - Leaving during class time to go to the rest room or locker
  - Fire drills and emergency exits
3. ***Routines and procedures for academic work***
  - Rewarding good behavior and/or consequences for misbehavior
  - How to listen to others during a discussion
  - What to do when students forget books, pencils, or materials
  - What students do who finish early
4. ***Closing of the school day or a class***
  - Collecting work at the end of the day or class
  - Cleaning up materials and supplies
  - Exiting the class or building

Review these questions.

1. What is the purpose of routines and why are they important to classroom management?
2. How will you know when students understand a routine?
3. How does an effective teacher reinforce a routine that is already established?
4. How does an effective teacher introduce a new routine to the class?
5. How do routines save time that can be used for teaching and learning?



## Rules, Rewards, and Consequences

**Key Question:** How do the rules, rewards, and consequences contribute to establishing a positive community of learners?

**Directions:** Ask your mentor to share the ways rules are created in this school and the types of rules she has in her classroom. Novice teachers who have difficulty managing a classroom often tend to create harsh rules like “no talking!” or “no getting out of your seat,” and these *no* rules are problematic for many students who have difficulty if their preferred style of learning is more social. How will you create appropriate rules? Reflect and respond to these questions. E-mail your responses to your mentor and discuss them at your next meeting. Bring a copy of your rules, a sample of rewards, and what consequences you are using.

A digital version can be found on the companion website.

### Creating Rules, Rewards, and Consequences That Promote a Positive Learning Environment

1. What rules, rewards, or consequences systems are working for you so far?
2. How do you let students know what the consequences are *prior* to their breaking a rule?
3. What are some problems, issues, or concerns you have about this topic?
4. How is “respect” demonstrated in your classroom? How do you model respect? Refer to the CONNECT page for August to review the respect form on the companion website.
5. What does being a *culturally sensitive teacher* mean to you? How do you demonstrate that?



## Learning School Procedures

**Key Question:** What do you need to know about the following procedures?

**Directions:** Getting oriented to the systems and policies in a school and district can be frustrating and confusing for a novice teacher. One way you can help is to be proactive and discuss the procedures with your mentor. We all have had experiences of touching a book in the library and finding out there is a *procedure* that this librarian uses. Save yourself from the distress of learning the hard way. Discuss the procedures below with your mentor and find out if there are more school culture issues you need to know about.

1. How does a teacher . . .
  - Sign out books from the resource center or library?
  - Use any computers or other equipment—where to get it and how to sign it out?
  - Reserve books for class lessons?
  - Order paper and school supplies?
  - Deal with medical emergencies?
  - Access student records and special education files?
  - Call for a substitute and leave work for the day?
  
2. What does a teacher do . . .
  - Before school; and how does she enter the building?
  - During homeroom or lunch room?
  - At recess, bus duty, or study hall?
  
3. How does a teacher use . . .
  - Faculty-only rooms?
  - The library or computer room?
  - An aide or paraprofessional in the classroom?



## Classroom and Behavior Management Issues

**Key Question:** How do routines minimize disruptions and promote a positive learning environment?

**Directions:** We all have heard that a prepared and organized teacher has fewer discipline issues in the classroom. To ensure you are prepared means you need to review routines and organizational structures that need to be in place. By discussing these topics with your mentor this month, you minimize the stress that can be created from a disorganized classroom. Review the following topics and select the topics that are most appropriate for you right now.

### 1. Classroom Routines and Organization

- Review what you are doing in your classroom to organize your space, time, and materials. Invite your mentor to visit and share your procedures.
- Ask your mentor to share effective systems for correcting papers, organizing materials, and grading student work. Ask him to share routines that save time and that may have taken years for him to figure out. Use the systems that fit for you.
- Organize a *sharing* meeting and invite other novice teachers to meet with you to share successful ideas for organizing systems that save time in the classroom.
- Ask your mentor to share efficient ways to begin and end lessons so that housekeeping activities required (such as collecting lunch money or homework) take minimal time away from classroom instruction.

### 2. Behavior Issues With Individual Students or the Whole Class

- List any problems you are having with specific students right now. Share the problems with your mentor or other beginning teachers in your support group to gather possible ideas.
- Schedule time to interview teachers at the school who have creative ways to avoid behavior problems. Ask your mentor to give you names of teachers they have observed as successful.
- Discuss appropriate consequences for situations that arise in the classroom with your mentor. Share the difference between students not completing homework and students who are seriously disrespectful to others and why the consequences have to be different.





### Looking at Student Work Together

**Key Question:** How can looking at student work samples help you improve your teaching practice?

**Directions:** Bring a set of completed student assignments to a meeting with your mentor. Select three students from the class randomly (without looking at names). If you are using a school-based rubric for assessing student work, use that to review the assignment and grade each student. Ask your mentor to also do this process. Compare and share your assessments of the students. Are they close? Why would they be different?

1. Decide on the criteria for assessment and then rate the three random papers separately using the school rubric or use this one. You and the mentor will use the same three papers for this activity.

1	2	3	4	5
Does not meet any criteria	Meets a few criteria	Meets some criteria	Meets most criteria	Meets all criteria

2. Compare and share how you rated the students with your mentor. Discuss any differences in ratings and explain why you rated a student that way.
3. What is difficult about rating student work?
4. Why is this important to review student work with each other each month?



## Communicating With Parents

**Key Question:** Why is it important to communicate with parents regularly?

**Directions:** Discuss ways you could communicate with parents this month. Review the examples here and add your own.

### 1. Examples of communication may include the following:

- *A letter mailed to the home.* Ask your mentor to share samples of letters that have been sent to parents from teachers in the school. If the school sends a formal letter welcoming students, review that letter with your mentor. Will you also write a letter to students?
- *A letter sent via the students.* It may be easier to write a letter and give it to the students to hand deliver to the parents sometime during the first week of school. Ask your mentor if this is a good idea. Some teachers may want to have a return receipt to ensure the parents or guardians received the communication.
- *An e-mail to parents.* Some school systems have parent communication through e-mail. If this is an option at your school, discuss the appropriate ways to do this. The down side for e-mail is that the parents then have access to you 24 hours a day, and this may be overwhelming.
- *Letters or e-mails could include a brief biography of who you are, some examples of what the curriculum will include this year, and ways the parents can keep in touch. Policies for homework and expectations for materials students should bring to class may also be included.*

### 2. Organize a classroom social

If the school does not sponsor an official Open House, you may ask your mentor to help you organize a social to meet and greet the parents. It could be a “coffee and conversation” early in the morning before students arrive or an early evening after parents leave work. The goal is to have parents meet you early in the year, so if you need to be in touch later, they already know who you are and your classroom procedures.

### 3. Why it is important to connect with parents early

- Builds a relationship with the teacher before there are any student behavior issues.
- Demonstrates that the teacher is reaching out to share what is going on in the classroom.
- Allows the teacher to share expectations for learning and homework and gain support.
- Allows teachers, based on the response from parents, to get an indication of who is willing and able to connect—for example, those parents who may not speak English or parents who work night shifts and cannot attend meetings. This gives you the time to create alternative ways to communicate throughout the school year. It also lets you know the parents who cannot attend scheduled conferences but who do still care about their children’s progress.



### September Novice Teacher Reflections

**Directions:** Complete any of these prompts to summarize your experience this month, or add your own. Compare and share your reflections with your mentor or other novice teachers in your support group. You can also complete these reflections in your Novice Teacher Journal.

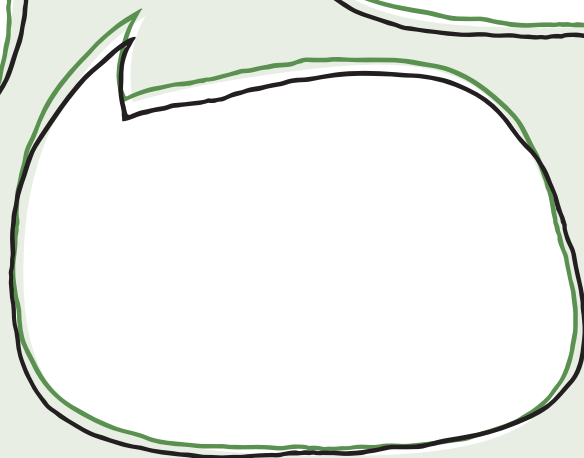
I love . . .

I am excited about . . .

I am having difficulty with . . .

As a 2+ year teacher, I am learning . . .

My mentor could help me . . .



## Using Mindfulness to Explore Teaching Dilemmas

Teaching is complex, and often there are not clear answers to situations that arise while you are being mentored. The teaching dilemmas introduced at the end of each month in the REFLECT section may not always apply to you; however, the process of reflecting on this dilemma will help you think about what you might do if this did happen to you. Sometimes when a situation arises that we didn't anticipate, we react and say things before we think. This journal process will allow you to pause and think about what you would like to say next. These dilemmas are useful for mentoring conversation starters, novice teacher support group discussions, and personal reflection.

### *Dilemma 2: Including All Students in the Community of Learners*

You are beginning the school year on a good note, and your mentor has visited your classroom to see how you are organizing the space. You had several behavior problems this month, so you had to separate the most disruptive students from the rest of the class. Your mentor asked about this, and you didn't know how to respond and felt that you might be doing something wrong. These students are from other cultures, and you wonder if because English is not their first language, they might be frustrated. Now that your mentor has seen this, you are wondering if this is the best way to handle their behavior. *What do you do?*

Respond to these prompts in your Novice Teacher Journal, available on the companion website.

1. State the dilemma as clearly as possible in one sentence if you can.
2. What decision do you need to make in regard to this situation?
3. Write about the emotions that come up for you that relate to this situation. If you have two choices, write how the emotions might be different.
4. Stop and reread what you have written. Underline any key words or phrases that stand out for you.
5. Soften your eyes or close them and take three deep breaths. Ask yourself, what am I missing that I have not noticed? Write that down in your journal.
6. How can your mentor help you? Write your reflection in your journal.
7. If you are truly stuck, bring your dilemma to another novice teacher who is in their second or third year of teaching. Ask him or her to listen and to ask you questions to clarify your dilemma. Ask her not to give advice, just to ask you questions to help you clarify your feelings and next steps.
8. How do you feel about this dilemma now? All dilemmas are not resolved! This is a process of clarifying and understanding how you feel and how you might proceed in the future.

**Directions:** Complete the goal-setting processes alone or with your mentor. Write your responses on this page or in your Novice Teacher Journal, available on the companion website.

1. *Goal for Improving Your Teaching Practices*

- Review the PLAN–CONNECT–ACT–REFLECT pages you completed in this chapter with your mentor. Look ahead to October ACTs to see what you may focus on to continue development.
- Acknowledge what you are learning! Be specific about what you have done that is working.
- Reflect on your teaching this month. What will you do differently next month?
- Agree on ONE goal with your mentor to reinforce your learning for next month.
- Goal:

2. *Goal to Support Your Social and Emotional Well-Being*

- Discuss any challenges you may be facing right now. Challenges often bring stress.
- Don't ignore any signs of stress! Pay attention and ask your mentor about ways to manage stress.
- Continue to learn about mindfulness by reading "Five Simple Lessons for Social and Emotional Learning for Adults," available on the companion website.
- Goal:



A good teacher walks around the classroom helping everyone do things they don't understand.

—SEVENTH-GRADE STUDENT



NOVICE TEACHER PHASE: OVERWHELMED

“There is so much to do in one day!”



NOVICE TEACHER AFFIRMATION

I am inspired to be the best teacher I can be.