

20 Things to Know Before Teaching Music at an Elementary School

1. Really know your teaching style

- Are you going to teach with Orff, Kodaly, or a combination of both?
- Is your classroom going to be singing, instrument, or movement focused or a little bit of all 3?

2. Learn who you'll be working with

- You do not need to know every teacher and staff members names when you start, but be familiar with them.
- Really get to know the secretary and janitor because you will need them a lot more than you think.
- Get to know the art, P.E., and library teachers really well. You will all be considered as part of a team.

3. Know what your classroom looks like

- This seems like a no brainer, but if you are aware of what your classroom looks like, it will help you with planning.
- It will also help you with knowing how to set up your classroom and where to set up your instruments.

4. Find out what your principal expects from you

- You had an interview and got hired. Congrats! But, now you need to know what they really expect from you.
- Don't walk in the first day and think you're going to put on programs a certain way, and come to find out, they had completely different expectations.
- Forming a good relationship with your principal from the beginning can make a world of difference in the long run.

5. Decide what resources you'll need

- You may walk into your classroom to find that you have no teaching resources or instruments (just like I did).
- You don't need to purchase a bunch of things right away, but knowing what you have to work with will definitely help.

6. Know your budget

- I'm sorry to say, but unfortunately some schools don't have a budget for the music program.
- Your district will sometimes give you a certain amount, but this isn't guaranteed.
- If you don't have a budget from your school or district, you can apply for a grant.

7. Plan out your year

- You may have a curriculum to follow, or you might not.
- It always helps to start the school year off with a plan, even if you don't know every lesson you're going to teach yet.

8. Schedule out your programs

- Decide the dates of your programs from the beginning of the year.
- So many field trips, assemblies, and other things come up, and having your stuff on the calendar as soon as possible will help with any conflicts.

9. Ask other music teachers questions

- You may not know very many other music teachers in your school district yet, but you will get to know them.
- Ask questions from your mentor teacher or your professors as much as you can.

10. Go over your student list

- You will probably have every child in the school, so being familiar with their names ahead of time helps.
- Some kids have tricky names, so just looking over the student list will help you learn the names quicker.

11. Know how often you get the students

- Will you have them every week, every other week, or once every two weeks?
- The size of your school usually sets this determination.
- How often you get the students will help you when you're planning out your lesson plans.

12. Find out how long your class periods are

- Will your class periods be 30 minutes, 45 minutes, or an hour?

13. Know how you'll structure your class time

- Will you start off with a warm up or a greeting song?
- How often will you introduce a new song or activity?

14. Decide what instruments you need

- Sometimes your music classroom will already have several musical instruments available to use.
- Or, you might be at a school with no instruments, so you need to decide exactly what you need.
- I would suggest a good combination of rhythm instruments and barred instruments.

15. Figure out how you'll communicate with parents

- As a music teacher, communicating with parents isn't always easy. You have so many students, so emailing everyone isn't always the best choice.
- Sending home newsletters in the kids folders (some schools have things like Tuesday folders) will probably increase the chances the letters go home.
- Your school may have a Facebook page set up, so communicating there is also a great idea.

16. Have your classroom management plan in place

- You learned in college that classroom management matters. You have no idea how much it truly matters.
- The very first week of school, you will need to practice procedures and know what classroom management you will include in your classroom.

17. Procedures for everything

- Speaking of procedures, you will need to have a procedure for everything.
- Practice the procedures with your students more than you think you should.

18. Have lesson plans ready

- Have at least 2 weeks of lesson plans ready to go.
- If this is your first year, a lot of this year will be a learning curve.
- Do not beat yourself up if a lesson didn't go as planned. It happens to every teacher.

19. Know what duty you'll have

- You will more than likely have some kind of before or after school duty.
- Find out what duty you'll get before school starts so you're not caught off guard.

20. Give yourself a break

- Don't be too hard on yourself. You will be nervous and that is completely normal.
- Step into school the first day with confidence.
- Having everything in place, not just physically but mentally too, will help you to feel and do your best teaching.