

Creating a Professional Image

As a **first-year teacher**, you have no name recognition, no reputation and no credibility. Think of it as a **clean slate**. Your behavior and your interaction with all the groups that make up the school community will not only **define your image**, but also have an impact on the image of the profession as a whole.

Based on the findings of surveys such as the *Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher*, *Gallup Polls of the Public's Attitude Toward the Public Schools*, and studies on school/community relations, we know that **schools are more highly rated by those who know them best**. Both **parents and teachers** think more parental involvement will improve education, and students and newspapers are the top sources of information about what's going on in school.

The ideas below are **time-tested positive image-makers which will help you make a good impression on students, parents, your peers, administration, and school partners**. As you read, relate the ideas to your own personality and perceptions about your community. Choose those that will work for you or **adapt the ideas for your own setting**. In addition to these individual projects, get involved in the community action programs TABCO initiates.

From the beginning, **let parents know you believe a working partnership with them is best** for students. **Send messages home** about what they can do to support learning. **Invest** in stamped postcards—once a week, **send a postcard to a parent** with a positive note. **Call at least one parent a week** to share a positive attribute of a student. **Invite** parents to join the class and assist with school projects

Invent ways to give students practical experience with writing. **Teach your students to write letters** to members of the community, and then actually send them. The letters may relate specifics of a classroom project that tie into a community organization activity or state an opinion about **how young people might be persuaded to participate more fully in community affairs**.

The **best lessons** to be learned by students from such letter writing are those of stating a suggestion tactfully and gracefully, **writing with a positive tone** and making a point clearly and concisely.

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Carry your work around with you in a **folder or a briefcase**, almost everywhere you go—to the laundromat, to the barbershop, to the doctor’s office. You can even grade papers while waiting for a bus. You will need every available moment to get your work done, but think of it as yet another chance to **let the public know how much you enjoy it**. **Make time each day for you** to ease the stress. **Ten minutes** a day, just for you, is better than nothing.

In early November, **send home a list of good books** for parents to consider for holiday giving. List a **few academic books**, but include mostly books that are **interesting or entertaining**, and at the same time of **literary or academic merit**, as they relate to your teaching area.

Also, if you can find **one extra hour** at the beginning of the school year, divide all your students’ names into nine or ten lists according to the **month of their birthdays**. Then send home a **book gift list** the month before each student’s birthday, making the distribution a first-of-the-month activity. In June, distribute book lists for those with birthdays in July, August and September.

See what happens when you **assign an essay** or paragraph on the topic, **“The best thing about my school is...”** After using samples of class entries in the classroom and discussing them for form and content, **submit three or four** of the most interesting ones to the **local newspaper**, expressing pride in these students’ perception of their role as learners.

Send home requests for a parent or grandparent to write down (in a space provided by the request sheet) a few words relating to a **strong memory** or an anecdote from their own lives in reference to the topic being **studied in class**.

Display your degrees and certificates. Every other professional has these documents framed and hanging on their office walls, you should too. Not only is it **good for those times when parents visit your classroom**, but think about the **positive effect** it has on your students.

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Have a classroom **bulletin board** where each week a student gets to **display their five favorite pictures**. Let parents know about the **success of their children** in the classroom. If the only time parents hear from you about student progress is when there's a problem, they **transfer those negative feelings to you**.

Send letters of **welcome to new students**. When students transfer during the year, they and their parents often have questions about **how to fit in**. You could put together a **survival kit for new students** that include a map of the area (ask the AAA), locations of favorite **student hangouts**, dress code (or at least what's normal—ask a student to write this part), homework expectations and a list of what has already been covered in each subject.