3 Ways to Avoid the Dreaded "Teacher Lottery"
by Emily Makelky

We've all heard it. Kids talking about their schedules like this, "Yes! I'm going to get an A in math this year because Ms. So-and-so is so easy!" Or, "Dangit, science is going to be so hard. I got Mr. Tough-stuff, and he doesn't let anything slide." As teachers, you never want to be considered the easy teacher, but you also don't want to be the hard teacher that the students dread. But, what if there was no easy teacher or hard teacher, and all learning environments were equally fair? Here are three ways to even the playing field for your students so that the "teacher lottery" becomes less varied.

Set Clear Curricular Expectations

First things first, standards are not curriculum, and neither is a textbook! Depending on the state and content area, some standards are written to be very broad and general. Some are written for a grade band rather than a specific grade level. In many cases, a standard can be interpreted differently by different teachers. Additionally, standards are not organized into teachable units and may not include a level of emphasis or rigor. Textbooks, on the other hand, may include levels of emphasis and rigor, but may not reflect local priorities and may have more lessons than can be taught in one school year. In my Intro to Business class for example, my textbook included 28 chapters. But in any given year, I could only get through 13 of them with my students. The

textbook that my school had adopted for that class included more than twice the amount information that I could teach my students.

The solution to both of these issues, is to develop a local curriculum that is organized into teachable units made up of learning targets that are written clearly (so all teachers interpret them the same way), are measurable (avoid verbs like understand, learn, etc.), and is appropriate for the amount of time that you have with your students. This way, the expectations are clear for both teachers and students.

Make End-of-Unit Assessments Common

When all teachers for the same course are using the same assessment to determine success, students are held to the same expectations. To further ensure that teachers are administering the common assessment fairly, include a set of "administration guidelines" as a cover sheet. Information that should be clarified in the Administration Guidelines includes:

- the amount of time a student is allowed to complete the assessment (must the assessment be completed within a single class period so students cannot discuss answers when they gather after class?),
- any materials they are allowed (are math students permitted to use a calculator, or language arts students a dictionary?),
- the amount of assistance a teacher is allowed to give when a student has a question (may a teacher explain the definition of a word, or clarify directions?),
- and the criteria for successful completion.

Please note that the Administration Guidelines as explained above are meant for general education students that are not on IEPs. Any student with an IEP must be given the modifications that are outlined within their IEP. Similarly, when administering common assessments to ELL students, consult their ELL teacher to determine appropriate accommodations.

Collaborate as a grade-level team

The big idea for all curriculum and assessment work is to improve classroom practices. By collaborating with your grade-level team, you're able to share what worked and what didn't. So, if something didn't work in your lesson, ask a colleague who saw success to share what strategies they used. It's OK to be vulnerable, and in fact, improving your teaching depends on it. Look for areas that you can improve and help those that can use your help to find more success in their classroom.

Students have enough to deal with without having to worry about which teacher they're going to have. It will take a bit of work up front to complete the steps outlined above, but your school will be better for it. Your school doesn't need easy teachers or hard teachers, they need good teachers.

Need some help with these things? Let us know!