



Leveraging MTSS in the Classroom: Classroom Environment and Structures (Elementary)

August 2026

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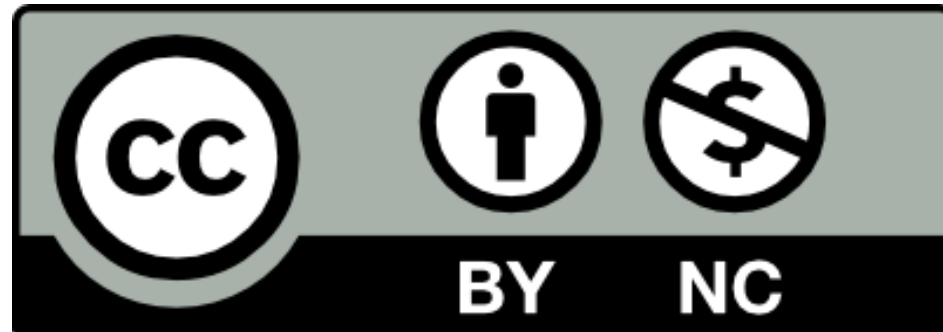


Acknowledgments

The content for this training day was developed based on the work of:

- Dr. Terrence Scott
- National Center on PBIS
- Midwest PBIS
- The START Project

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Purpose

This session will equip educators with actionable strategies to design classroom environments that promote student success through proactive physical arrangements, establishing clear expectations and routines, and effectively using classroom visuals.

Intended Outcomes

- Consider different classroom arrangements to maximize structure and monitoring
- Understand best practices for developing and teaching expectations and routines
- Review types of visuals that can reinforce expectations and promote independence

Agenda

1.0 Supportive Physical Environments

2.0 Expectations and Routines

3.0 Classroom Visuals

4.0 Wrap Up and Next Steps

1.0 Supportive Physical Environments

Research for Physical Arrangement

- Strategic seating and classroom arrangement are proactive behavior supports
- Physical environments can increase desired behaviors and reduce behaviors that interfere with or disrupt learning



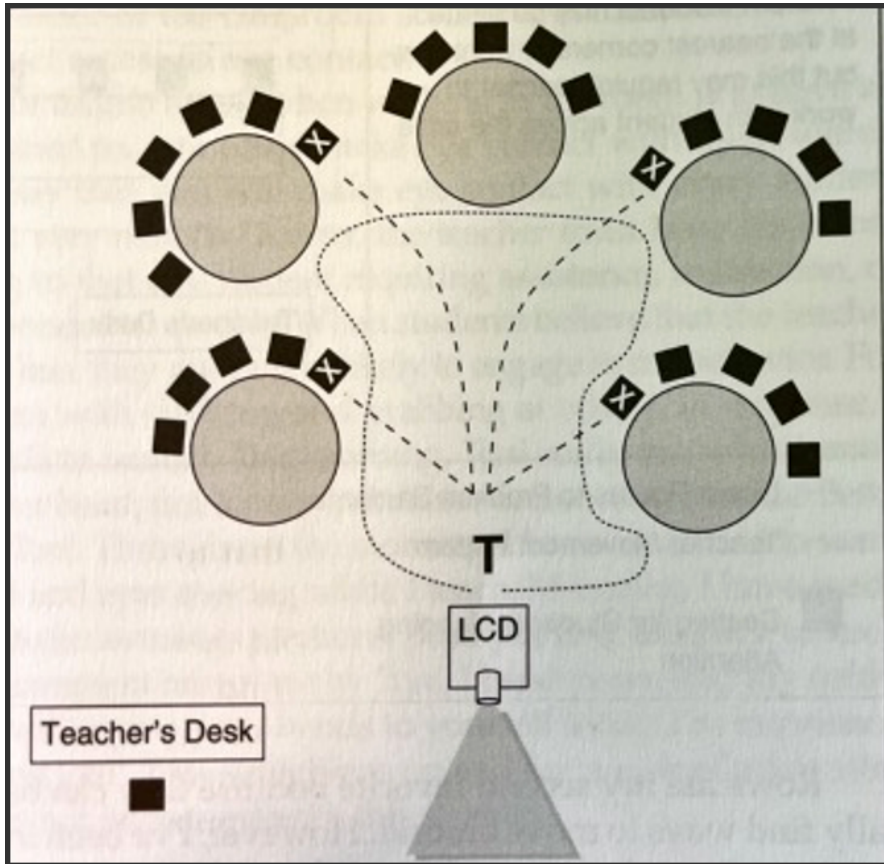
(Wannarka, Ruhl, 2008)

Physical Environment for Safe & Predictable Classrooms

- Minimize crowding and distractions
- Arrange seating to support visibility and proximity
- Design clear pathways for smooth transitions and movement
- Establish seating and desk locations that support safety and awareness
- Include a safe space for students to relax and self-regulate
- Design the environment to prevent predictable behavior

(Scott, 2018; The National Childhood Traumatic Stress Network, 2017)

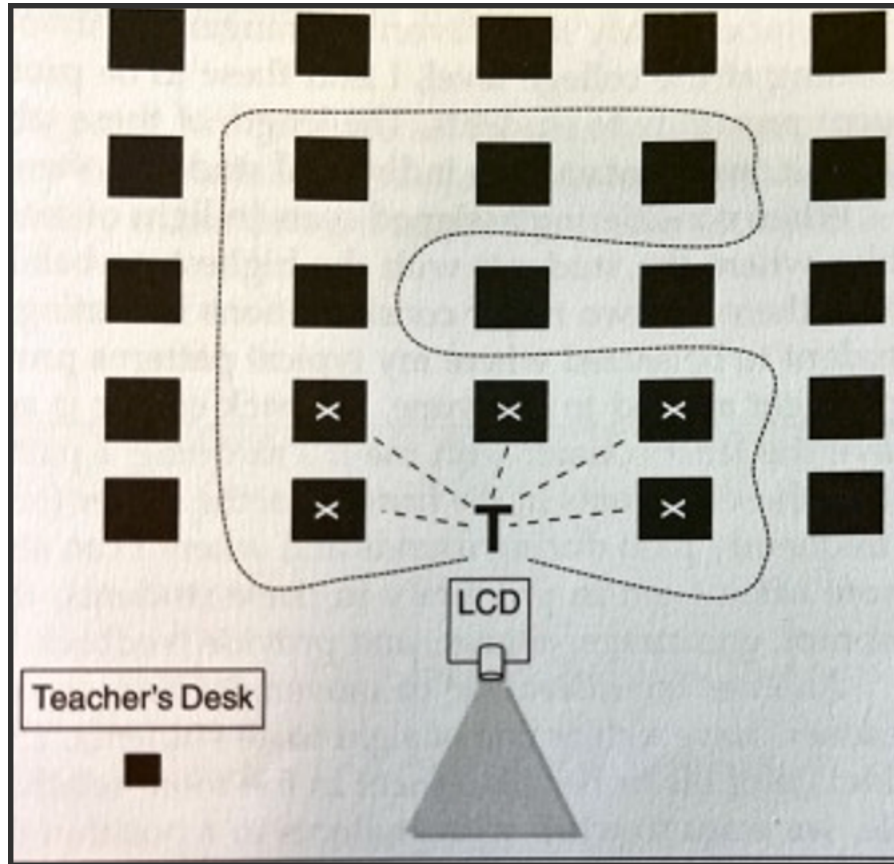
Round Tables or Clusters



- Maintain proximity to all groups with minimal movement
- Move quickly and directly between tables or clusters
- Seat students who need more support in positions for easy teacher access

(Scott, 2017; p. 89)

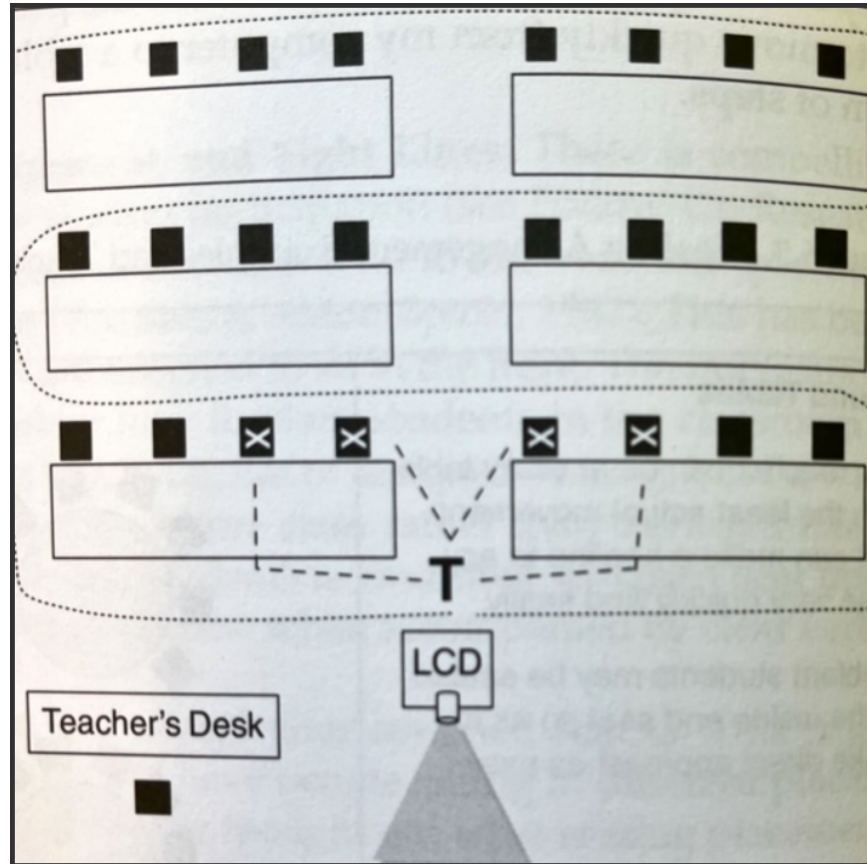
Rows



- Requires increased teacher movement to maintain proximity
- Allows movement both across and between rows
- Seat students who need more support in the front for quick, consistent access

(Scott, 2017; p. 89)

Long Tables



- Requires more movement and can be restrictive—must make large circling routes to see every student
- May require working across the table to provide direct support
- Seat students who need more support nearest corners or front row

(Scott, 2017; p.90)

Activity 1.1

Pause and Process:

- Briefly review the *Checklist for the Classroom Physical Environment*
- Consider the prompts based on your classroom or one that you support
- Identify 1 or 2 priorities for improving the physical environment:
 - What is currently working well?
 - What might be an opportunity for improvement?
 - Note any action items for the upcoming school year

2.0 Expectations and Routines

Expectations, Routines, and Procedures

- Expectations
 - The broad, school-wide values and beliefs that guide adult and student behavior.
- Routines
 - The predictable patterns of how the classroom operates over time. They create structure and consistency for how the day or class flows.
- Procedures
 - The explicit, step-by-step directions for how to complete specific tasks or routines.

Sample Classroom Matrix

Sample School Way	Welcome	Group Work	Transition	When you feel upset...
Responsible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn in homework • Put materials in desk • Begin work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do your fair share • Manage time carefully 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean up your area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop and breathe • Recognize what you're feeling "I feel..."
Respectful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Say "good morning" to teacher and classmates • Talk in soft voices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to understand • Take turns speaking • Say "I like that idea, AND..." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stand and push in your chair, OR • Listen for direction to next activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use break spot • Express feelings appropriately: "I feel __, can I __?"
Safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put personal belongings in designated areas • Take your seat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean up area when time is up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eyes on me • Wait to be called 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to any adult if you need help • See something, Say something
<i>Teacher's Role (Conditions for Learning)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Positive Greetings at the Door</i> • <i>Bellwork posted</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Actively supervise small group activities</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Teach, practice, reinforce transitions</i> • <i>Agenda posted</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Use Active Supervision to predict triggers</i>

Teach Expectations and Routines Explicitly

- Be clear and explicit about expectations
 - “When we transition, voices are at a level 0 and materials are put away within 30 seconds.”
- Model what expectations look like and sound like
 - Demonstrate how to enter the classroom, including where to go, what to do, and voice level.
- Show examples and non-examples
 - Act out a correct transition vs. an incorrect one and have students identify the differences.

Practice and Build Consistency

- Provide regular opportunities to practice routines
 - Build in time for students to rehearse transitions or procedures multiple times during the first weeks
- Give feedback in the moment
 - “You raised your hand and waited your turn. That’s being respectful.”
- Reinforce and re-teach when needed
 - “Let’s pause and try that again. Show me how we walk safely and quietly in the hallway.”

Reinforce and Acknowledge

- Use behavior-specific praise to recognize when students meet expectations
 - “Jamie, I noticed you raised your hand and waited your turn. Excellent job, being respectful.”
- Use consistent language for expectations
 - “Remember, walking in the hallway means voice level 0 and hands to yourself.”
- Reinforce what you want to see more of
 - The behaviors you attend to the most are the behaviors you will see the most of in the future.



Activity 2.1

Pause and Process:

- Expectations: What 3-5 expectations are most important for your students this school year?
- Routines: Which routines will students need to understand to meet these expectations?
- Procedures: How will you explicitly teach and practice these routines so students can succeed?

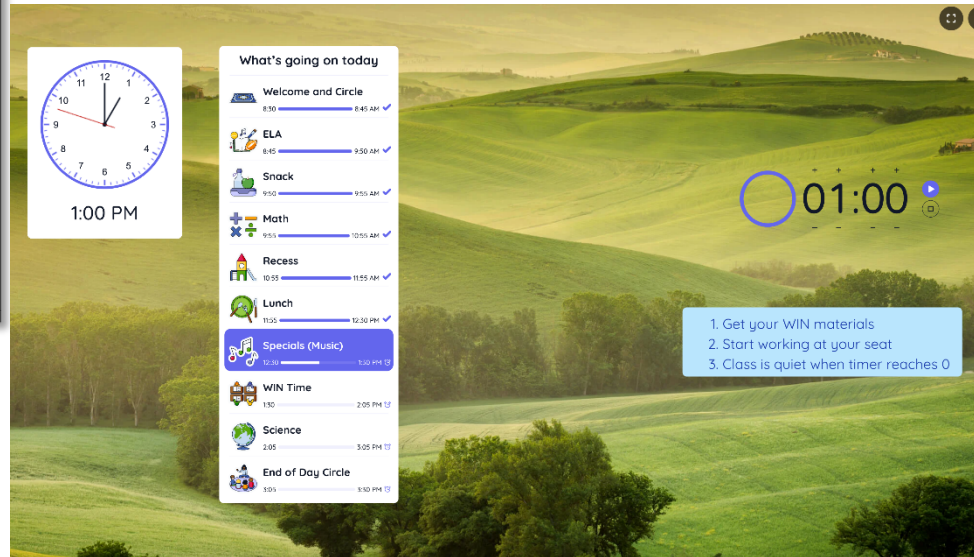
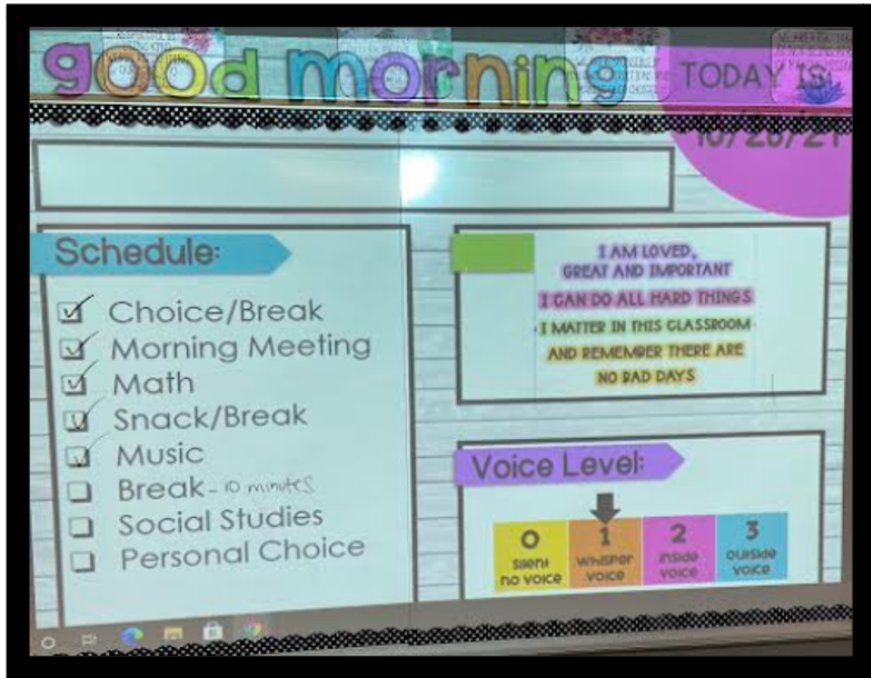
3.0 Classroom Visuals

Visuals

- They don't disappear
- They make abstract concepts concrete
- They promote independence
- Ignore interfering behaviors without ignoring the child

(Cohen & Demchak, Council for Exceptional Children)

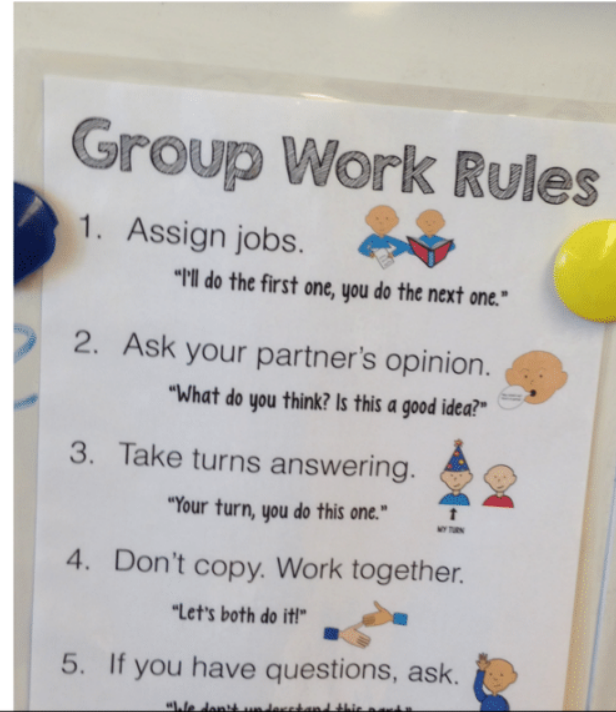
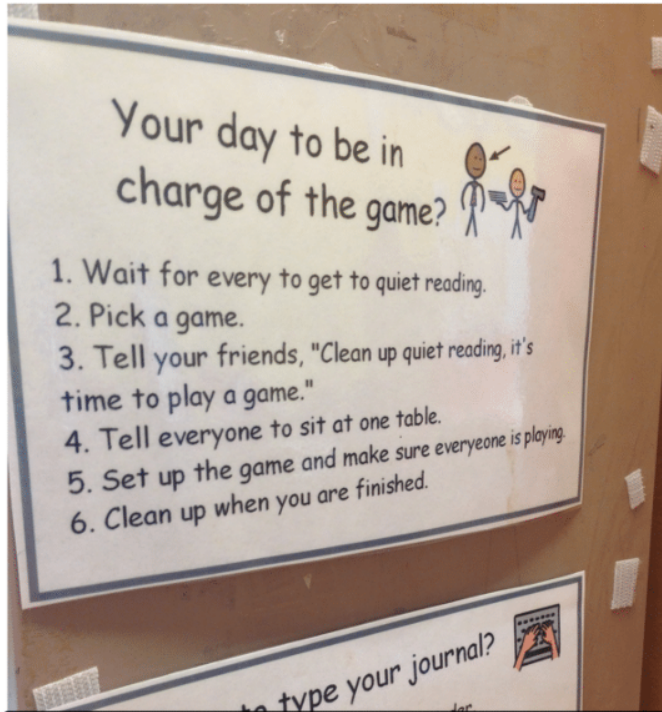
Daily Schedules Increase Predictability



Increasing Structure in the Environment



Prevent Behavior by Breaking Down Difficult Tasks/Activities




use mini schedules for social skills steps



Routines Increase Predictability

Mrs. Jones' Math Class



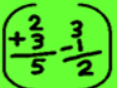
I Need:

- green textbook
- green notebook
- green pencil case
- calculator

Routine:

- go to seat
- put homework in green basket
- get assignment
- copy notes
- listen to teacher
- raise hand to answer question

math




- pencil
- textbook
- paper
- calculator
- ruler
- markers

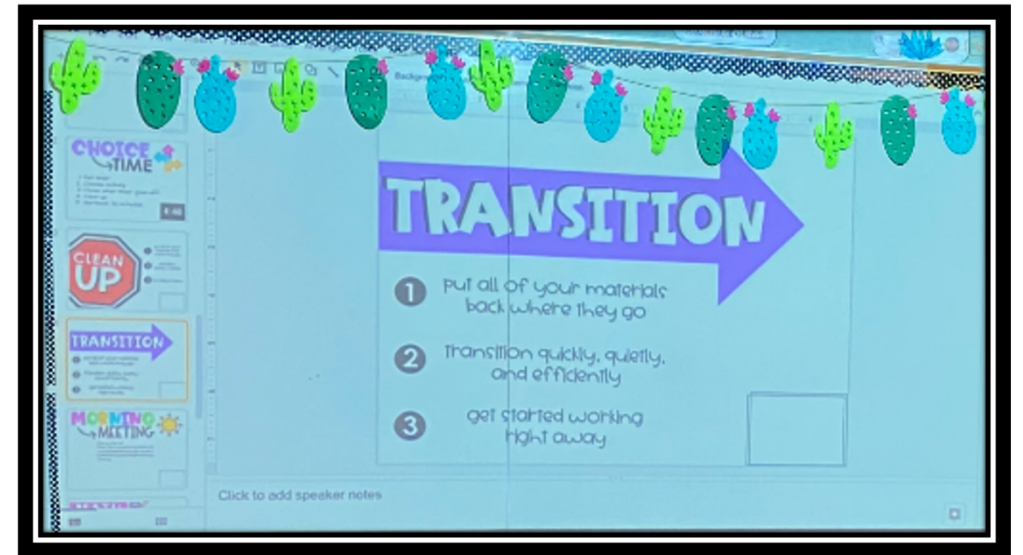
geography



- pencil
- textbook
- atlas
- binder
- ruler
- markers

If	Then
	

Prevent Behavior By Assisting with Transitions




Visuals to Support Staff

MY OTR Goal:
3 Per Minute

Say Something
Write Something
Do Something

Choral Response White Board Turn and Talk

Quick Write Thumbs Up/Down Online Survey

 **Correction Card**

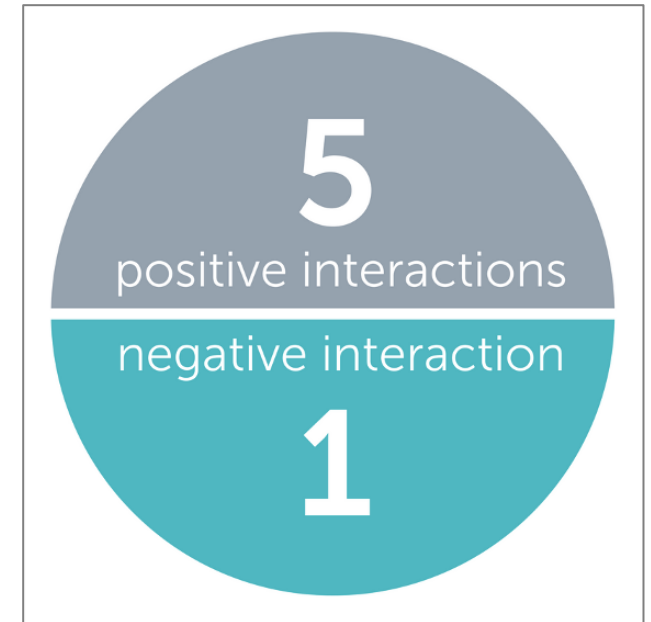
How to give help to the Reader

When the Reader makes a mistake or is stuck on a word for 4 seconds:
Coach: "Check it!"

Reader: "I need some help."
Coach: "That word is _____
What word?"
Reader: Says the word correctly.
Coach: "Good. Read the sentence again."
Reader: Re-reads the sentence.

Reader: Says the word correctly.
Coach: "Good. Read the sentence again."
Reader: Re-reads the sentence.

(Adapted from Peer Assisted Learning Strategies: Reading Methods for Grades 2-6, by D. Fuchs, L. Fuchs, D. Simmons, and P. Mathes, 2008, p. 179.)



Beyond Just Posting The Visual

- **Teach** and model what is on the visual
- **Review** to keep it “visible”
- **Provide** individualized support when needed
- **Positive Feedback** when they display appropriate behaviors
- **Reteaching** consistently
- **Reference** to support independence



Activity 3.1

Pause and Process:

- Environment:
 - What visuals could structure your classroom and support predictability?
- Student support:
 - Which visuals might help students with difficult tasks or transitions?
- Staff support:
 - What visuals would help you guide routines and instruction?

4.0 Wrap Up and Next Steps

Key Takeaways

- Thoughtful classroom arrangements maximize structure and make it easier to monitor learning
- Teaching expectations and routines using best practices set students up for success
- Classroom visuals reinforce expectations and promote independence

Share your biggest takeaway from the session in the chat.

Next Steps

- Stay connected with the TA Center
 - Join our listserv, follow our social media pages
- Participate in additional professional learning
 - On Demand
 - EduPaths
 - YouTube
 - Microlearning
 - Professional Learning Sessions
 - In-person
 - Virtual

References

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