

## Focus on Teacher Education, a feature column



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### Preparing preservice teachers for their first year

Do you ever worry about the *real* first-year-teaching information that your middle grades candidates may be missing out on in your program? You know... Can I afford to pass on NEA membership? What if I want to take my students on a field trip...is this a good idea? If so, how do I plan the trip? Whose permission do I need? What about saving for retirement? How soon can I take a vacation day, and what if I have an emergency but do not have any days available? What then?

These are things that aren't always covered in my particular program of study, as they give way to more pressing topics like lesson planning, student diversity, and assessment. That said, though, these are sometimes the very things that I feel like I can't afford to *not* tell my students because they add to that personal level of comfort that's so important to teacher retention. In addition, I have to confess that I'm pretty aware of the need for this information, but that I sometimes shy away from specifics because I know it only takes a minute for the rules to change. Since I'm no longer in the public middle school setting, I'm not always aware of the most current laws and nuances; therefore, I'm generally afraid to venture out and talk specifics for fear I'll share misinformation.

After some pretty guilty semesters of just plain ignoring these peripheral topics, I decided to address them this past spring semester. Now, it's important for you to first know that my course, The Philosophy and Curriculum of Middle Grades Education, is taught on-site at Concord Middle School, which is one of two professional development schools that our UNC Charlotte middle grades students enjoy. This particular course carries a 40-hour clinical requirement and returns four hours of course credit. It's also important for you to know that I assign my students to interdisciplinary teams within the class and have them work all of their assignments through the teams, a mandate that begins by mid-semester. Finally, this is the second of a two-course sequence, so these

students have already spent fall semester digging into early adolescent development together.

So, that said, I began to consider how I could get this information out to my students accurately, but without spending a great deal of precious class time on it. I quickly realized that the natural teachers for this were the Concord faculty who took the lead in supervising my candidates' clinical assignments in their classrooms. After getting permission to directly involve the school in filling this information gap, I designed a scavenger hunt for my students to complete as the introductory activity for their course interdisciplinary teams. This quickly proved to be successful enough to share with you here, so take it, modify it, and try it on your own!

Before you dig in, though, a quick reflection on the activity.

This worked:

- The scavenger hunt immediately introduced the candidates to Concord Middle. This included the building's geography, its faculty and staff, and the myriad programs that the site supports.
- Clinical Teachers felt like they began work with their assigned students on sound footing. This activity was a good ice breaker, and when also provided with the syllabus, gave the CT's a good overview of the semester's expectations and discussion topics.
- The scavenger hunt proved to be a good opening activity for my student teams. The bonding that they experienced paved the way for deeper discussions and assignments related to such topics as integrated curriculum, the importance of advisory, and actual curriculum design. The accomplishment of these tasks then became a three-way conversation between the candidate (and course team), the Clinical Teacher (and school team), and me.

This needs a second look:

- Some key members of the Concord faculty, like the guidance counselors and administrators, were interviewed by multiple teams, which proved quite taxing for everyone. I'm going to revise my next round of the activity to include a core of questions for all teams to answer, but different questions per team that target the specific folks, thus eliminating seven or eight teams asking the same person the same question. The teams can then discuss their core information but share out the exclusive information that they've gathered.

So...here we go! Modify it as you wish and let me know what you think.

Jeanneine

# Figuring Out Middle School: Round One

## Team Scavenger Hunt!

### Directions:

Each team should read the directions and items together, and then divide the task among itself. Each team must find all of the information required, and no team may consult another team for answers. You can—and actually must—however, consult Concord Middle’s population, including faculty, administration, staff, and students (though you should be aware of convenient times that do not interrupt instruction or distract students. Also, be courteous and don’t ask the same person, for example an administrator, the same question that six other teams have asked. Instead, find another administrator to consult.). Note that most numbers are followed by complex questions requiring multiple responses. Please answer the question fully. This assignment will be graded.

The first team to email back a completed Scavenger Hunt with 100% of the information correct (and with documentation submitted in person within 24 hours) will get a cool prize (ummm... that’s cool by *my* standards!). The final product is due for everyone else no later than March 12. Have fun!



### Let’s Get Going!

1. Who is responsible for setting up the school’s teams? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What type of schedule does the team follow (based on those described in our text)? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Does your Clinical Teacher (CT) feel like the schedule works for the school, or does s/he have suggestions for improvements? (If yes, what are they? List your responses to this last question below.)

How is the team leader chosen? \_\_\_\_\_

What are some of the responsibilities of the leader of your CT’s team? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Ask at least 15 teachers and 100 students this question: What is the single most important characteristic for a great middle school teacher to have? Tally your responses and then list them in order of frequency, with the most frequent response first. Label and attach your compiled list and all raw data. (Hint: Divide this across the team so that each of you can ask a class of students to write the answer down for you. Won’t take but a minute!) List your team’s top five answers in the table below.

### Characteristics of Effective Middle School Teachers

Students' Perspectives	Teachers' Perspectives
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

5. Who is the best disciplinarian in the school? List an agreed-upon name in the blank space here. List others in the extra space.

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Survey 100 students and ask them for their favorites, as listed in the table below. Compile your answers by team and list them here. Label and attach your compiled responses and all raw data. (The hint given in #2 applies here too! In fact, you can make one big survey with all of this stuff on it.)

#### Stuff I Now Know About Concord's Early Adolescents

What is Their Favorite:	Single Most Frequent Response:
Magazine	
Book	
TV show	
Movie	
Recording artist	
Thing to do in free time	

6. Survey 15 teachers and ask them for their best three tips for working with challenged kids and with advanced kids. (...and they can define challenged and advanced in any way they want). List your most frequent responses below. Label and attach your compilation and all raw data.

#### Tips for Working With Special Populations

Challenged Students	Advanced Students
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.



7. What is the most useful resource for new teachers on the NMSA website? What about the NCMSA website? Bookmark these sites!

8. List the workdays left in this semester. What do teachers typically do when they are at school on a workday? \_\_\_\_\_

List the days when the school is closed; for example, spring break. Are teachers paid for these holidays? \_\_\_\_\_

9. What is the price of a teacher's lunch in the cafeteria? On a scale of five stars to one (with \*\*\*\*\* being the highest restaurant rating), how many stars does your CT rate the:

- Price \_\_\_\_\_
- Quality of service \_\_\_\_\_
- Appearance of food \_\_\_\_\_
- Variety of food \_\_\_\_\_
- Nutritional value of food \_\_\_\_\_
- Taste of food \_\_\_\_\_

(Hint: If your CT doesn't eat in the cafeteria regularly, ask another teacher who does.)



10. List four different reasons why you would refer a student to the Guidance Counselor:

- 
- 
- 
- 

11. What type of information are you required (by law) to report if a student tells you? \_\_\_\_\_

To whom must you report it? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the chain of reporting after that? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your on-going obligation to the case? \_\_\_\_\_

12. What option(s) does the school provide for after-school care when parents work? \_\_\_\_\_

13. List two great ideas for field trips that integrate into the team's Standard Course of Study in some way:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



14. What do these stand for and what is each?

- NCLB: \_\_\_\_\_
- AYP: \_\_\_\_\_
- EOG: \_\_\_\_\_
- List a website where you can learn more about these government regulations: \_\_\_\_\_

15. What are a North Carolina teacher's benefits in terms of:

- Health insurance: \_\_\_\_\_
- Vacation time available during school term and how it is accrued: \_\_\_\_\_
- Yearly contracted dates of employment:

- 
- Personal days, how they are earned, and restrictions on use: \_\_\_\_\_
  - State retirement: \_\_\_\_\_
  - What happens if you are required by your district to do work in the summer when you are off-contract? (For example, attend professional development, work on a textbook selection committee, or design curriculum for your school) \_\_\_\_\_
  - What is the current starting salary for a new teacher in this state? How much does an M.Ed. add? What about National Board Certification? \_\_\_\_\_



15. Ask 20 teachers for their top four Do's and Don'ts for beginning teachers. Compile their responses in order of frequency, and list the seven most frequent responses below. Label and attach your compiled list and raw data.

Top Five Do's and Don'ts for New Teachers

Do this:	Don't do this:
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.



16. Ask your CT these questions:

- Why is it important to “bond” a team? \_\_\_\_\_

- What are two successful ideas for team bonding that your CT has experienced this year or last year? \_\_\_\_\_

17. How does the media specialist select new titles to buy for the library (both magazines and books)? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the Newbery Medal and how is that award chosen? \_\_\_\_\_

What is one of the most frequently checked-out books in the Concord library? \_\_\_\_\_

What is one of the most frequently read magazines in the Concord library? \_\_\_\_\_

18. Let's say you have a great idea for a class project, but you need supplies. Where do you go for them? \_\_\_\_\_

19. How are extras like bus duty and committee work assigned and who makes those assignments? \_\_\_\_\_

20. What's the NEA? \_\_\_\_\_

21. Do most teachers seem to join this? \_\_\_\_\_

22. Does your CT think a new teacher should join? \_\_\_\_\_

23. How much are the yearly dues? \_\_\_\_\_  
What are the specific benefits and what's a web



address where you can learn more about this organization and its benefits to teachers?

\_\_\_\_\_

Who is Concord's NEA representative?

\_\_\_\_\_

24. List four titles found in the school's professional library that appeal to you:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

(Hint: If the school doesn't have a professional library, ask an administrator or the media specialist why. Record that response in the spaces instead of titles.)



25. Ask an administrator or the school's security officer for specific ways in which the school ensures the safety of its population. Record those notes here. \_\_\_\_\_

26. What do teachers do when there is a fire drill? \_\_\_\_\_

27. Where is the copier that your CT uses? Find it and learn how to use it. To practice, copy a set of papers for

your CT and have him/her sign below to verify. Is there a restriction on the amount of paper that a teacher has to use for the year? If yes, what happens if the supply runs out? \_\_\_\_\_

Verification of copying done for me: \_\_\_\_\_

28. How do Concord students learn about issues like obesity, smoking, alcohol use, and general social decision-making? Is this effective? How do teachers know?

\_\_\_\_\_

Is obesity a problem among Concord students? \_\_\_\_\_

How does the faculty know that it is or is not? \_\_\_\_\_

If this is a problem, how is the school addressing the issue of obesity among its early adolescents? \_\_\_\_\_

If they are not addressing this, why aren't they? \_\_\_\_\_

29. Ask at least four teachers to discuss their use of Marzano's *What Works in Schools*. What has this book led to for these teachers?

- \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



About the author - Jeanneine P. Jones taught fifteen years in a nationally acclaimed middle school in Alamance County. She is now a professor of middle grades education and the program's coordinator. Her primary accomplishments while there include two teaching awards, recognized service to more than 125 schools and districts, and more than 75 professional publications and presentations.