

## Month 1: Center Based Classroom

I have two must-haves for a successful classroom. It's got to have small groups and it's got to be structured. So maybe you already run a center based classroom. Great or this is brand-new to you, which is great too because we're going to learn a lot whether or not you've been doing this for a while or it's new to you. We want to re-evaluate our setup every year because the needs of our kids change every year you might have new students you might have new paras maybe you got a new classroom that's always a fun first day of school surprise, right? But regardless the needs of your kids are going to change year to year. And the way your classroom is set up and the station's you have in your room is a tool to help your students learn and we want that to reflect the needs of our students.

So every year we want to re-evaluate the centers in our classroom and the setup of our room to make sure that its meeting the needs of our students the best way we can small group instruction is In a self-contained classroom the skill set is just too wide to do whole group instruction effectively. When you do whole group instruction to a very broad group, you have kids at all different skill levels. We tend to plan to the middle and in doing so the kids were the content it's way too easy for are bored and the kids that have the content where it's way too hard for them and they can't access it at all our bored too, we don't want half the group to be bored and off task behaviors happen when kids are bored. That's just human nature. The last time you sat at a long stoplight.

What did you do? Probably pulled out your phone and started checking emails, right? We engage in off-task behavior is when we're not engaged, small group instruction will allow us to individualize the learning for each group of kids.

It might look more complicated, but it's actually easier because you're going to be able to plan academic activities exactly for this skill sets of each groups of students.

So the first step is grouping your learner's you want to look at those IEP goals and create your groups of students that have similar goals because you want to be efficient with your planning. If you have several students working on pronouns great.

Let's group those kids together. If you have several students working on basic skills, like colors and letters and numbers group them together. So when you make one activity, they all can be doing it at the same time. Now, you also want to consider the behavioral needs of your students. You want to think about what skills will work well together you want to think about potential triggers for some of your students. Maybe you have one kid. That is very set off by loud noises. Maybe we don't group him with another student that makes a lot of loud noises. So we want to think about how we can best match up those behavioral needs as well. The next step is creating centers or stations for your classroom. You're going to want a combination of adult run stations and independent stations. So you want stations for yourself as a teacher and then stations are centers that will be run by your paraprofessionals. Your each station or Center will have a part in your classroom and kids will rotate between the different centers throughout the day.

We're going to talk more about how they rotate around those centers in our schedule video coming up next. So you want students to go between adult run stations where

they're working on IEP goals, communication skills. Social skills all those great things and then independent centers that could be independent work that could be playtime that could be technology or computers. I have a whole list of different Center ideas in the download section. If you just want to start brainstorming some new ideas if this is how you've always run your classroom. This is a great prompt to re-evaluate what's going on to look at maybe what Center is you want to add what things you want to change if there's anything in the layout of your room that you need to change. This is a good prompt right now to go ahead and do that because sometimes we just get stuck in a rut on setting things up. Up the same way every year. So it's good to always think about why we're setting things up that way. We want to give each Center or station a part of our room and we want to make sure that that Center is visually defined there's a clear start point to that Center and a clear ending point to that Center and it's visually divided so we can minimize distractions using room dividers using shelves using specific tables to really make sure it is clear where that Center starts and where that Center ends and then having the distractions limited.

So the students that are working there can really focus. Then we want to label each area of the classroom. This one helps with our schedules that we'll talk about later but it helps for staff management. We want to make sure all the staff knows where to go to and if you say hey go over to the reading Center and they don't know where the reading Center is. Obviously we're going to have some miscommunications that are coming right away. It's important to get this started in a specific way. We don't want to start this new process of establishing new centers. Whether this is the beginning in the year or the middle of the year. We don't want to come on with the new process of the center's plus challenging academic work in each Center. We want to work on each skill individually. So we're going to start with teaching the skill of staying in your centers and learning the routine. So the work that at is at each station in the classroom for now is going to be easy put puzzles put fun games put things that are previously mastered because right now the demand is not doing something hard at the center and learning a new skill. The demand is transitioning between the center's staying with your group knowing which adults you're supposed to be with knowing that you just don't get to pop out of your chair and go to the play area whenever you want to so the expectation there is learning that skill. So that's what we're going to focus our time and energy on and that's what we want our kids to focus their time and energy on so for now don't worry about the academic work that's going on at each station.

Keep it easy. Keep it simple. This is about learning the routine. It's kind of like syllabus week. Remember that first week in college and syllabus week. You just came to class you learned where the room was you met the professor you looked at that syllabus and maybe felt a little overwhelmed with all the work coming, but it was just to get everything ready. So you want to view the start of this process as syllabus week and we're just getting everyone ready for the work that's coming. This is also a great time to evaluate how you've set up your centers. Sometimes we set everything up and then once it's set up, even if we know, it's not right. We don't want to make a change because we think up we've labeled it already or we've already set things up over there. And even though I know this isn't working quite right.

I want to power through and make it work. My advice is make those changes. When you see that they need to be made if you have centers that maybe don't work quite right or the order of the center's doesn't make sense make those changes now use this syllabus week period as also a period where you can evaluate if things are working or not and if they're not working change it maybe you need to add more centers. Maybe you need more independent centers maybe the way that your students are rotating doesn't really make sense. We kind of want them to go in order in the room makes things a little easier. So take the time to make those changes. If you have questions or you want to troubleshoot this process. I would love to come to our next Facebook live with your questions and we can talk all about how the center's are going in your classroom.