

CALIFORNIA SUBSTITUTE TEACHER HANDBOOK

Edition: 2026



Prepared For:
California Substitute Educators



**PATHWAYS TO TEACHING
CONSULTANTS, LLC**
GIVING YOU THE STEPS TO SUCCESS

To provide substitute teachers with practical guidance,
legal information, instructional strategies, and professional
resources for successful classroom management
and student support.

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1. WELCOME TO SUBSTITUTE TEACHING IN CALIFORNIA

Substitute teachers are essential members of California's educational system. Your presence ensures instructional continuity, maintains a safe learning environment, and supports student achievement when regular teachers are unavailable.

Successful substitutes demonstrate:

- Flexibility
- Professionalism
- Strong communication skills
- Adaptability
- Patience
- Cultural awareness
- Classroom management expertise

Your primary responsibilities are to:

- Maintain student safety.
 - Follow the teacher's lesson plans.
 - Uphold school and district policies.
 - Promote a positive learning environment.
 - Document important information for the regular teacher.
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2. UNDERSTANDING YOUR ROLE

As a substitute teacher, you serve as the teacher of record during your assignment.

You are expected to:

- Implement prepared lessons.
- Manage student behavior.
- Take attendance accurately.
- Supervise students during assigned duties.
- Communicate professionally with school staff.
- Protect student confidentiality.

You are not expected to:

- Diagnose learning disabilities.
 - Discuss student information with unauthorized individuals.
 - Change grading policies.
 - Administer medication.
 - Use physical discipline.
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3. CALIFORNIA CREDENTIALING REQUIREMENTS

Most substitute teachers in California hold an Emergency 30-Day Substitute Teaching Permit issued by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC). This permit authorizes service in preschool, K–12, and adult education settings for up to 30 days in the same general education classroom during a school year and up to 20 days in the same special education classroom.

Common permit options include:

- Emergency 30-Day Substitute Teaching Permit
- Emergency Substitute Teaching Permit for Prospective Teachers
- Emergency Career Substitute Teaching Permit
- Teaching Permit for Statutory Leave (TPSL)

Requirements typically include:

- Bachelor's degree or qualifying college coursework
- Background clearance through Live Scan fingerprinting
- Application through the CTC
- Verification of basic skills requirements, which may be met through degree completion or approved alternatives.

Important assignment limits:

Assignment Type	Maximum Days
General Education	30 days per teacher
Special Education	20 days per teacher
Career Substitute Permit	60 days per teacher

Always verify assignment restrictions with your district's Human Resources office.

4. PROFESSIONAL EXPECTATIONS AND ETHICS

Substitute teachers must:

- Arrive on time.
- Dress professionally.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Demonstrate impartiality.
- Follow district policies.
- Communicate respectfully.

Avoid:

- Discussing students publicly.
- Posting school information on social media.
- Using personal devices during instruction.
- Sharing political or religious opinions.
- Accepting social media requests from students.

Professional boundaries protect both educators and students.

5. BEFORE ACCEPTING AN ASSIGNMENT

Review:

- School location
- Grade level
- Subject area
- Start and end times
- Parking instructions
- Special requirements
- Bell schedule

Questions to ask:

- Is this a special education assignment?
 - Are there scheduled duties?
 - Is there technology access?
 - Will instructional aides be present?
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6. PREPARING FOR THE SCHOOL DAY

Bring:

- Government-issued identification
- Substitute permit information
- District badge (if provided)
- Notebook
- Pens and pencils
- Whistle (for recess duty)
- Water bottle
- Healthy snacks
- Emergency lesson activities

Create a “substitute bag” that includes:

- Age-appropriate brain breaks
- Read-aloud selections

- Writing prompts
 - Math challenges
 - Icebreaker activities
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7. ARRIVAL PROCEDURES

Arrive 30–45 minutes early.

Upon arrival:

1. Check in at the main office.
2. Obtain classroom keys and materials.
3. Review lesson plans.
4. Locate emergency exits.
5. Learn emergency procedures.
6. Verify attendance procedures.
7. Introduce yourself to neighboring teachers.

Locate:

- Restrooms
 - Nurse's office
 - Staff lounge
 - Copier
 - Emergency supplies
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8. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Establish Expectations Immediately

Introduce yourself clearly.

Review:

- Classroom rules
- Daily schedule
- Expectations for participation

Example:

“Good morning. My name is Ms. Smith, and I am your teacher today. We will follow your teacher’s normal routines and work together respectfully.”

Effective Management Techniques

- Use proximity control.
- Maintain consistent expectations.
- Provide positive reinforcement.
- Use nonverbal cues.
- Give clear directions.
- Redirect behavior privately.

Addressing Minor Misbehavior

- Restate expectations.
- Offer choices.
- Redirect attention.
- Document incidents.

Serious Behavior Concerns

Contact administration immediately if a student:

- Threatens harm
- Leaves supervision
- Engages in physical aggression
- Possesses prohibited items

Never use:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical punishment | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Humiliation• Sarcasm• Group punishment |
|---|--|
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9. INSTRUCTIONAL BEST PRACTICES

Follow lesson plans whenever possible.

If plans are incomplete:

- Consult neighboring teachers.
- Contact the department chair.
- Use grade-appropriate enrichment activities.

Instructional strategies:

- Model directions.
- Check for understanding.
- Use think-pair-share.
- Encourage participation.
- Monitor independent work.

Remember:

Students benefit most from consistency.

10. SPECIAL EDUCATION CONSIDERATIONS

Students with disabilities are entitled to services outlined in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Substitutes should:

- Review available accommodations.
- Collaborate with support staff.
- Follow behavior support plans.
- Maintain confidentiality.

Common accommodations:

- Extended time
- Preferential seating
- Visual schedules
- Frequent breaks
- Reduced assignments

Never discuss a student's disability with others.

11. SUPPORTING ENGLISH LEARNERS

California schools serve students with diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Strategies include:

- Speak clearly.
- Use visuals.
- Model tasks.
- Check understanding frequently.
- Pair students strategically.
- Use gestures and demonstrations.

Avoid:

- Speaking louder instead of clearer
 - Assuming language proficiency equals academic proficiency
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12. TECHNOLOGY TOOLS AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Common California school platforms include:

- Google Classroom
- Canvas
- Schoology
- Seesaw
- PowerSchool
- Aeries
- Frontline Absence Management
- ClassDojo
- Clever

Technology best practices:

- Use district-approved devices.
- Protect passwords.
- Log out of accounts.
- Report technical issues promptly.

Never:

- Save student information to personal devices.
 - Use personal email for school business.
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13. STUDENT HEALTH, SAFETY, AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Know procedures for:

- Fire drills
- Earthquakes
- Lockdowns
- Shelter-in-place
- Evacuations

California schools commonly use:

- Run, Hide, Fight protocols
- Standard Response Protocol (SRP)
- Incident Command System (ICS)

Review:

- Emergency folders
- Student medical alerts
- Classroom evacuation maps

Never leave students unsupervised.

14. MANDATED REPORTING RESPONSIBILITIES

California substitute teachers are mandated reporters.

You must report suspected:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse

- Neglect
- Exploitation

You do not need proof.

You only need reasonable suspicion.

Follow district procedures immediately and report concerns to designated administrators.

Do not:

- Investigate independently
 - Interview students extensively
 - Notify parents
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15. CONFIDENTIALITY AND STUDENT RECORDS

Federal law under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protects student information.

Confidential information includes:

- Grades
- Attendance
- Health records
- Behavior reports
- Disability status

Keep all records secure.

Discuss students only with authorized personnel.

16. CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

California classrooms are diverse.

Effective substitutes:

- Use inclusive language.
- Honor student identities.
- Pronounce names correctly.
- Avoid stereotypes.
- Encourage multiple perspectives.

Create environments where all students feel:

- Safe
 - Seen
 - Valued
 - Respected
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17. END-OF-DAY PROCEDURES

Before leaving:

- Complete attendance records.
- Organize materials.
- Tidy the classroom.
- Return technology.
- Secure confidential documents.

Leave notes including:

- Lessons completed
 - Student successes
 - Behavioral concerns
 - Missing work
 - Questions for the teacher
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18. LONG-TERM SUBSTITUTE ASSIGNMENTS

Long-term assignments may require additional responsibilities:

- Lesson planning
- Grading
- Parent communication
- Team meetings
- IEP participation (as authorized)

Clarify expectations with administration.

Understand:

- Compensation structure
 - Evaluation procedures
 - Assignment duration
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19. PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Professional learning opportunities:

- County Offices of Education
- California Commission on Teacher Credentialing
- California Teachers Association
- California Association for the Education of Young Children
- Regional Occupational Centers

Consider training in:

- Classroom management
 - Trauma-informed practices
 - Restorative practices
 - Special education
 - English learner instruction
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20. ESSENTIAL RESOURCES

State Agencies

California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC)

Official credential information and applications.

California Department of Education (CDE)

Standards, curriculum frameworks, and educational guidance.

Professional Organizations

- California Teachers Association (CTA)
- Association of California School Administrators (ACSA)
- California Substitute Teachers Association
- National Education Association (NEA)

Free Instructional Resources

- Khan Academy
- ReadWorks
- CommonLit
- Newsela
- PBS LearningMedia
- Smithsonian Learning Lab
- National Geographic Education
- CK-12 Foundation

Classroom Management Resources

- PBIS.org
 - Responsive Classroom
 - CASEL
 - Edutopia
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21. QUICK REFERENCE CHECKLISTS

Before School

- ☐ Arrive early
- ☐ Check in at the office
- ☐ Review lesson plans
- ☐ Locate emergency exits
- ☐ Test technology

During the Day

- ☐ Take attendance
- ☐ Follow lesson plans
- ☐ Monitor student behavior
- ☐ Document concerns

Before Leaving

- ☐ Complete notes for teacher
 - ☐ Clean workspace
 - ☐ Return keys
 - ☐ Sign out
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22. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

504 Plan: Accommodation plan for students with disabilities.

Aeries: Student information system used by many California districts.

Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP): Strategies to support student behavior.

CAASPP: California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress.

Canvas: Learning management system.

CDE: California Department of Education.

Clever: Single sign-on platform for educational applications.

CTC: California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

EL: English Learner.

ELL: English Language Learner.

FERPA: Federal law protecting student records.

Frontline: Absence management system used to schedule substitutes.

Google Classroom: Digital learning platform.

IEP: Individualized Education Program.

LEA: Local Education Agency.

MTSS: Multi-Tiered System of Supports.

PBIS: Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

PLC: Professional Learning Community.

SEL: Social-Emotional Learning.

SST: Student Success Team.

TK: Transitional Kindergarten.

UDL: Universal Design for Learning.

FINAL REMINDER

Students may not remember every lesson you teach, but they will remember how you made them feel.

Be prepared. Be flexible. Be professional. Be kind.

Your work matters.