



AUTISM CLASSROOM RESOURCES PODCAST EPISODE 45: 5 REASONS YOU NEED ZONING PLANS

URL: <http://autismclassroomresources.com/episode45>

Welcome back to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I'm Chris Reeve, and I am your host. And I'm excited that you are joining us again. We're in the midst of talking about setting up classrooms for the new school year. Of course in our current situation in 2020, that's a little different.

Now is the time in the classroom setup process when we need to talk about creating the staff schedule with a classroom zoning plan. In the course of this Setting Up Classrooms series, I have talked about [getting to know the students](#), [built our classroom schedule around their needs](#), and [organized the furniture and classroom environment](#). And I've talked about how to do it all with this strange upcoming fall of 2020 in mind.

Managing Classroom Staff

We know that this coming year is going to be different. But whether you are teaching at a distance or you are teaching in the classroom, teachers are likely to still be working with paraprofessional. How we do that continues to be important.

There is a ton that goes into creating a true classroom team that works together. I actually covered many of the steps to truly create a team in the classroom in the first 5 episodes of the podcast. [You can start listening to them here.](#)

To truly build a classroom team, you have to have a good schedule, or zoning plan. But there is more than just the schedule. You have to [build relationships](#), [create the culture](#), [create a collaborative vision for the classroom](#) and [train staff and provide feedback](#) in a meaningful way.

Much of what we need to do in creating the classroom team, though, is communicating expectations and assigning responsibilities collaboratively. And that's where [the staff schedule or classroom zoning plan comes in.](#)

What Is a Classroom Zoning Plan?

Put simply, a zoning plan is a schedule for the staff. But it is detailed enough to tell the staff what they need to be doing. It doesn't replace a lesson plan for daily activities that change. But it gives direction to everyone in the classroom or educational environment.

A well-designed zoning plan should tell classroom staff:

- Who they are responsible for
- Where they should be
- What type of activity they should be doing
- What you expect them to do (e.g., taking data)

Here's an example of a staff zoning plan.

Teacher: Cheri Magnificent Year: 2016-2017 Date Created: 8/22/16 Page 5				
Time / Activity	Cheri	Rhonda	Bess	Notes
1:15-1:45 Playground	Take lunch	Supervise M and Y; Take M's bag outside. Assure he has on his hat.	Supervise W, G, and A	Make sure all materials including hats and medical are taken outside.
1:45-2:00 Center rotation 1	Run Art center with Y and W. Take data on group data sheet	Break	Run games center with A and M. Take data on group data sheet.	G goes to PE with general ed class
2:00-2:15 Center rotation 2	Run Art center with A and M. Take data on group data sheet.	Run games center Y and W. Take data on group data sheet	Break	
2:15-2:30 Snack	Write homenotes, check backpacks	Run snack as the communicative partner. Give food as students request.	Prompt students to request. Take data on group data sheet.	Make sure all diets are followed. Have teacher have all snack food and respond to communication requests to give to students.
2:30-2:50 Afternoon Meeting, Pack up/ Dismissal	Finish last minute notes.	Run afternoon meeting focusing on communication-see lesson plan. Dismiss students 1 at a time and keep activities going as they pack up.	Prompt students through the end of the day routine as they are dismissed from afternoon meeting.	
2:50-3:15	Door Duty	Planning time	Planning time	



AUTISM CLASSROOM
news & resources

©Autism Classroom Resources



Why Is the Staff Schedule Called a Zoning Plan?

It's a basketball thing. Really. It takes its name from the idea of a zone defense in basketball. A study by [LeLaurin & Risley \(1972\)](#) showed that setting up a classroom in a "zone defense" where a staff member is responsible for all the students in their area instead of being assigned to a specific student resulted in better engagement.

Generally, sometimes we use a man-to-man approach where specific staff are working with specific students. And sometimes we have zones. For instance, when students arrive at school, they rarely come in at the same time. So you zone one person to get them from the bus. She brings them to the classroom door where the staff is zoned to the schedule/arrival zone help them get checked in. And then, the students move to the [table tasks area](#). There, another adult is zoned to whoever comes into that area.

I stick with the term zoning plan because it describes more than just a schedule. A zoning plan needs to include not just the staff schedule, but the expectations for each activity that happen everyday.


Highlights of Episode 45

- What is a zoning plan and why do we call it that?
- 5 reasons why a staff schedule is important, particularly this year
- Ways to use a staff zoning plan to schedule and organize staff in distance learning
- Methods for zoning for distance learning
- Why a staff zoning plan is going to be even more important with virus mitigation measures in the classroom

5 Reasons Why You Need a Staff Schedule / Zoning Plan

I. It Maintains Engagement

A well-run classroom focuses on ways to increase the engagement of the students in meaningful activities. If the staff has to constantly check



among themselves to find where to be and what to do, this becomes down time while the students have to wait. Most of the students I work with are not good waiters. And downtime is not your friend. A good zoning plan increases engagement of students.

I believe this is going to be even more important this year. In a classroom with mitigation, everyone needs to know their roles to avoid downtime and prevent challenging behavior. And there will be more guidelines to follow that need to be fit into the routine.


In distance learning, teachers can use the staff zoning plan to give specific duties to staff members to help support them in their teaching. That may include doing breakout groups in video conferences. They could help in any number of ways, as I outlined in [Episode 33 on 7 Ways to Involve Paras in Distance Education](#).

2. A Zoning Plan Assures Each Job Gets Done

Once, I was in a preschool classroom. I watched the students transition from snack to circle. Fifteen students transitioned to the circle area with the teacher. And 3 paraprofessionals cleaned the table. It doesn't take 3 adults to clean the table. But it wasn't that the paras weren't doing what they should do. They all knew this needed to be done, but no one had outlined where they were needed. And there was no method to assure that staff knew where they were needed.

A zoning plan specifies who cleans up. A zoning plan makes sure that staff know which one of them should clean the lunch table and which ones should support the students during the transition. It includes who is taking data during an activity. And I even write in who is supporting which students during each activity.

So in the present year, with the need for sanitizing part of the classroom, a zoning plan is going to include those duties. A zoning plan will assure that the precautions and cleaning gets done. And it will still assure that the staff is scheduled to support the students.



In distance learning it allows the teacher to outline specific duties for paraprofessionals. In addition, provides documentation of planning for instruction for the students, even at a distance.

3. It Avoids "I thought you had it/him" Syndrome.

The more detail and specifics the staff schedule contains, the less possibility of things getting lost. I even zone in who is in charge of taking the walkie talkie to lunch or recess. Otherwise I find that we have cases of "I thought you had it." A zoning plan avoids just that issue. And let's face it, it's one thing to forget a walkie talkie. It's another when a student goes unsupervised that you thought someone else was supervising.

In distance learning, this is no less of an issue. It's important if your paraprofessionals are doing face-to-face instruction and practice with your students, that they know their responsibilities. If they are providing support with asynchronous things (e.g., uploading materials to the classroom site), then it's important they know what to do.

4. Staff Schedules Assure Lunches and Breaks

Staff schedules make sure that staff know when they will have a break. Having a break out of the class increases staff's engagement in the class.

I know we all think we are Wonder Woman and Superman, but let's be real. If you don't take a break out of the room once in a while, you will find yourself mentally taking a break IN the room with the students. That does not work.

Also, it's one thing for you to be a superhero. Even though we know the paraprofessionals are superheroes, it's not something you should expect from them.

If you are back in the classroom, I think it's critical that everyone have the opportunity to take a break. It's going to be stressful with new routines. We all need the opportunity to detach. And if you are teaching at a distance, it will be critical to outline the duties of the paraprofessionals from a distance.



5. Staff Zoning Plans are Management Plans

I know that all teachers went to school to be a manager and supervisor of others, right? Oh, you say you went to school to work with the kids?

Hmmmm, doesn't always feel that way.

Most teachers don't have experience supervising others. Teachers are also required to direct others who are older, more experienced, and who have been in the setting longer. You can develop a staff zoning plan as a team in collaboration. And takes the confrontation of direction out of the equation a bit. Putting it in writing helps everyone see what needs to be done for the good of the program.

And if worse comes to worse, having it in writing means that people can be held accountable (teachers and paras) for what they need to be doing.

Collaborating and listening to other team members about what they need and don't need (e.g., when they need a break) increases everyone's willingness to work together to have a room that runs itself.

And supervision is an issue whether you are doing distance learning, classroom learning with mitigation, blended learning or teaching anywhere.

More Resources and Examples of Zoning Plans

I've got tons of examples of zoning plans. I've rounded up many of my posts in the [Staff Management: Ultimate Setting Up Classroom series](#) with examples.

And, I have a free zoning plan for you in the [Resource Library](#). And if you want more help with writing a zoning plan, with lots of examples and checklists, I have a Toolkit in my store that can help. Or join the [Special Educator Academy](#) where we have that toolkit and a whole course on Setting Up Classrooms that includes building classroom teams.