CENTERS THAT WORK

Start Small, Build Success

A 4-Week Classroom Implementation Checklist

Get your first center running successfully before planning an entire rotation system.

Suggested times are sample daily independent-work periods, not requirements. Repeat a week until students demonstrate readiness. Adjust tasks, time, and supports to your learners.

WEEK 1 **5-10 min**

Start with ONE center

Teach independence before rotation.

- ☐ Choose one familiar activity students can complete independently.
- ☐ Prepare materials and a visual direction card.
- ☐ Model how to begin, work, clean up, and finish.
- ☐ Practice what to do when help is needed.
- ☐ Observe which routines need reteaching.

WEEK 2 **10-15 min**

Build stamina

Strengthen the routine you already taught.

- ☐ Keep the same center routine.
- ☐ Increase independent work time gradually.
- ☐ Teach an "I'm finished" routine.
- ☐ Practice solving simple problems without interrupting the teacher.
- ☐ Check independence before progressing.

WEEK 3 **15-20 min**

Add ONE more center

Add a familiar task, then teach movement.

- ☐ Introduce a second familiar, low-preparation activity.
- ☐ Model how to transition between centers.
- ☐ Practice a simple two-group rotation.
- ☐ Use a visual rotation chart.
- ☐ Reteach routines before adding complexity.

WEEK 4 **15-25 min**

Begin small-group instruction

Protect a short period of focused teaching.

- ☐ Review independence and transition routines.
- ☐ Practice what to do when you are unavailable.
- ☐ Meet with one small group for 5-10 minutes.
- ☐ Monitor interruptions and task completion.
- ☐ Add time or complexity only when students are ready.

Are we ready for the next step?

Ready indicators: ____ / 5

- ☐ Students begin without repeated teacher directions.
- ☐ Students find and return materials.
- ☐ Students know what to do when they need help.
- ☐ Students remain meaningfully engaged for the planned time.
- ☐ Students clean up and transition with minimal prompting.

Fewer than 5? Keep practicing the current routine. Reteach unchecked indicators.
All 5? Consider one small next step. Use observations across several practice sessions and maintain needed individual supports.

Reteach next: _____

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The 10-Minute Weekly Planning Tool

Plan the minimum you need for **one purposeful, familiar center**. Use the example as a starting point, then complete your plan.

Week of: _____ Center / group: _____

What skill are students practicing?

Example: CVC word blending

My plan: _____

What familiar activity reinforces it?

Example: Word-building with letter tiles

My plan: _____

What materials are needed?

Example: Letter tiles, word cards, recording sheet

My plan: _____

How will students know what to do?

Example: Three-step visual directions

My plan: _____

What happens when they finish?

Example: Read their completed words

My plan: _____

How will I check learning?

Example: Review five completed words

My plan: _____

You do not need new centers every week. Change the content, not the routine.

Keep the word-building center and replace the word cards. Students reuse familiar directions and materials while practicing new content. Match the new content to current learning needs.

Next week - keep: _____ Adjust / reteach: _____

Routine reminder: Begin > Work > Get help > Finish > Clean up