



Middle

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Matters

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Looking Ahead to the New School Year

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Summer's just about over and school will soon be in session! Parents are relieved that their kids are back on a routine and teachers are rejuvenated and ready to educate their young charges. The kids mumble and groan about going back to school, while we know that they are actually glad to be back with their peers. And you have spent a relaxing summer recharging your batteries—unless you are like most principals I know.

Principals spend their summers hiring teachers, teaching assistants, and office staff. You name the position and we hire 'em. Over the summer principals must also contend with late resignations, curriculum changes, changes to the student code of conduct, budget cuts, and staff development plans. There is so much to do that I often think summer is one of my busiest times of the year.

To combat the fatigue, I like to begin the year reflecting on what makes school a great place to learn:

Welcoming new teachers. One of the activities that gives me faith in our schools is welcoming new teachers to our profession. They are so excited and full of hope. These young professionals cannot wait to receive keys to their classrooms so they can begin transforming it into a learning sanctuary. As I age, it is refreshing to see and hear their eternal hope for our kids. They have confidence that they will truly make a positive impact on the lives of children.

Learning about students. I know principals and their assistants are not universally enamored with lunch duty or with drop-off and pick-up duty. But these are great opportunities to learn more about your students. Lunch duty is especially helpful to me as the kids are a captive audience. I often plop down beside a student with my lunch and start talking. Eventually they start to share and you hear funny stories, interesting tidbits about parents and the community, and even some heart-wrenching stories of family catastrophe.

Making a difference. Bus duty is a great way to check out adherence to the school dress code. The kids see me standing at the door and you can see them pulling that skirt down or pulling their pants up. If they are out of line they know that I will call their parents to discuss the latest fashion their child is wearing. I once called a coach in our district about his student's clothing and he was at my door in six minutes. I never had a peep of trouble out of that youngster again.

I'd love to hear about some of the activities that make your schools a great place to learn. Please share your ideas and comments with me.

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