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June: The end ... or the beginning?

Unless the world of K-12 education directly touches your life, June arrives as just another month, and a calling card for the beginning of summer. However, for students, their parents and family members, teaching and support staff, Principals, Vice-Principals, and district leaders, June is a Big Deal. It is hard to explain *how* big a deal – and the amount of work involved – to people not connected to schools. In business parlance, operating a school is the equivalent of starting a business, and then winding up that business, every ten months.

For most of us in K-12 education, June is about endings: the end of kindergarten, the end of each grade, the end of elementary school, school leaving, and the big one – graduation. June is when Principals and Vice-Principals tend to be consumed by year-end management tasks and activities that include staffing and timetables, interviewing and hiring, class building, and end-of-year accounting. We are writing year-end reports, generating data or information for the FESL (Framework for Enhancing Student Learning), our school's Growth Plan, our school's contribution to the district's Strategic Plan, or even our own *personal* Growth Plans. Much of the work is reflective of the past year as the weeks count down.



June is also a time when people end temporary assignments, others end current positions to move to a new school or district, and others embrace the grand work finale of retirement. No matter the circumstances, we tend to regard these milestones as endings. At year-end celebrations for colleagues, we celebrate and summarize their accomplishments

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and contributions. As Winston Churchill left office in July 1945, he wrote under his name in the visitors' book at Chequers (the weekend home of British Prime Ministers), "*Finis.*"

For many staff, students, and parents, these 'endings' can prompt anxiety and trepidation. We are leaving familiar people and settings – a teacher, a colleague, a classroom, school, or district – for the unknown. Like Captain James T. Kirk or early world explorers, we are about to chart unknown territory.

I tend to view these 'endings' as a prelude to a new beginning.

As educators, we are privileged to witness our students maturing and developing socially, emotionally, and academically day-by-day. We don't always consciously acknowledge the impact that each of us has on the success and growth of the students in our care. We also know that, like a book, each grade is not an ending but rather a chapter in the educational life of a student. And graduation, while a notable accomplishment, is today akin to the last page of a book in a multi-volume series, like *The Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter*. Students will move through untold stages of education and often multiple careers once they bid farewell to high school.

For our colleagues, leaving school through retirement is a big decision. How often have we bumped into a former colleague, only to be struck by how relaxed and rested they look as they navigate retirement and the next chapter of their life? While retirement could have signaled the 'end' of a career in the past, in today's world of work and in the current climate of workforce shortages, educators can choose to 'retire' from full-time employment, and return at a time of their choosing for a myriad of temporary assignments. For those later in their careers, with other projects and passions they may wish to pursue, it can be a scenario worth considering: reaping the continued joy of supporting students, but without the long-term tasks and commitments.

As your school year draws to a close this month, and whether you will stay in the same assignment, experience a change, or retire, I will paraphrase the sage advice of Winston Churchill:

This is not the end. This is not the beginning of the end, but instead it is the end of the beginning.

Congratulations, and best wishes on your next chapter.

Have a great summer!



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