

Summer's Graceful Pace

Everyone needs a vacation, although there are many interpretations of what a vacation is or should be.

Readers old enough to remember the Go Go's, an '80s all-female band, may recall the group's dance hit, *Vacation*, from its Gold Album of the same name. Chevy Chase lampooned the spectacle of a family vacation across four movies and two continents. In many European countries, workers receive an automatic annual vacation of 20 to 25 days, while it takes the typical American employee a quarter century of service to receive the same allotment. However long the respite and no matter one's age or homeland, the need to rest and recharge our emotional, intellectual, and physical batteries is universal.

Children are no exception. While the current school calendar stems from a bygone farming era, the summer months now delight thousands of youth who have no worries about detassling corn, herding cattle, or mending fences. Yet, today's vacation may pose other hardships for students and their working parents. Humorist Erma Bombeck said, "Being a child at home alone in the summer is a high-risk occupation. If you call your mother at work 13 times an hour, she can hurt you."

Even the youngest child needs time away, although comedian Steven Wright disagrees. "Babies don't need a vacation," he said, "but I still see them at the beach. I'll go over to a little baby and say 'What are you doing here? You haven't worked a day in your life!'"

Frankly, the complexities of learning and growing can be strenuous for children of all ages and their teachers. With mounting federal mandates, professional development requirements, and the pressure of high-stakes testing, the old agrarian nine-month school calendar is nearly obsolete. Educators and learners no longer get a lullaby-like vacation that spans Memorial Day until Labor Day, when it is "summertime and the living is

easy," as the Gershwin brothers composed.

In these 10 weeks without pupils, our schools are seldom totally quiet. Many students and faculty reconvene in summer classes while other teachers spend weekdays at local universities maintaining their professional certifications or completing that next required graduate degree. Barrington 220 administrators, maintenance and facility employees, and office support staff are also busy from mid-June to mid-August revising plans, cleaning classrooms, inventorying supplies, updating records, and improving learning spaces. At the Barrington Middle School-Station Campus, for example, construction crews are working nonstop this summer to renovate parts of the building so it is ready when students return in August.

Admittedly, summertime welcomes a different pace that, while not entirely carefree, allows a slightly less-hurried approach. The need for a playful breather in our stressful routines is not exclusive to summer. Even during the regular semesters, we recognize students' need to enjoy lunch, physical exercise, extracurricular activities and athletics, fresh air and time outdoors, and imaginative interaction with their peers. For instance, the design of the future Early Learning Center integrates attributes of play, natural light and connecting with the environment so our pre-kindergarten population with special needs or at-risk circumstances can learn in a developmentally appropriate atmosphere.

These considerations echo a district-wide emphasis on social-emotional learning, which transcends character education and goes beyond simply teaching students to be kind. With increasing concerns about underage drinking, bullying, eating disorders, suicidal tendencies, and many other harmful influences in the continuum from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, our schools must be retreats where students have the time and ability to be psychologically safe and

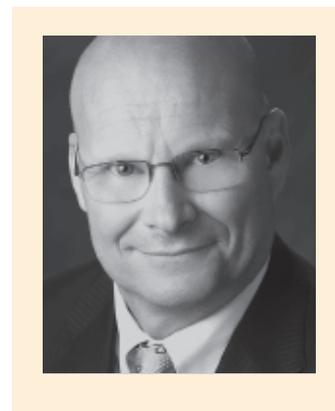


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intellectually healthy.

This leads me back to the importance of summer. Pulitzer Prize author Ellen Goodman was once asked what she wanted from her summer vacation. "Time," she answered, "the wonderful luxury of being at rest." She called summer her "period of grace." Maybe this is true for students, but in Barrington 220, the mental machinery that keeps education on track is still buzzing during the summer. Planning, analyzing, and reflecting continue while most children receive a well-deserved vacation, which ends on August 25.

Before it does, let's pause from "No Child Left Behind" and instead make sure we "Leave No Child Inside" this summer. As English biologist and politician John Lubbock once said, "Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass on a summer day listening to the murmur of water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is hardly a waste of time." In Barrington 220, our grace period — our summer vacation — is precious time we cannot squander. U