

The Space of Summer in a Teacher's Heart

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A teacher's calendar runs differently than everyone else's. Our year typically begins in August or September and ends in May or June. This transition is always filled with excitement, a little sadness, anticipation, and joy.

I was reminded of this a few weeks ago as I watched my daughter pass from 8th grade to high school. It seems like yesterday she was the bubbly young girl wearing pigtails and a backpack that was bigger than her. And now here she was, a young woman, wearing heels, now taller than me.

As I watched her teachers shake this girl-turned-into-young-woman's hand, I began thinking about this summer transition. These teachers have cared for, mentored, and challenged my daughter for the past 9 years, and now she is moving on. Another group of students eagerly (or not so eagerly) awaits them in a few short months. So, while these transitions do make me a bit melancholy, they are also inevitably a cause for celebration and reflection.

My wife cries each year as she says goodbye to her students. After pouring all of her love, energy, and patience into the class, there is a release of emotion as she realizes it is suddenly over. The students are no longer hers. She hugs each of them, tears in her eyes, as she releases them to fly into the open door of the next school year.

I have always loved this "release into flight" metaphor for children. It is full of sadness, of hope, and of wonder. We rarely talk about this part of our work. About the space that opens up in our hearts at the end of a school year. The space hurts for a bit, but then stays open for the joy of summer, eventually to be filled by new students in September.

As you begin to rest this summer, before the planning starts for next year, take a minute to bask in the space in your heart that the students created as they left your classroom. Take a minute to thank them for creating it. Enjoy it being empty as you read on the beach. And finally, enjoy as it begins to fill in August when you start to set up your classroom for the coming school year.

Happy Summer.