

Summer: Relax, Then Get Ready

“Summer afternoon – summer afternoon; to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language.”

– Henry James

Summer...what a wonderful season. When I was a high school principal, I always made sure to position myself between the students and buses as the last bell rang to signal the beginning of summer vacation. If we could harness that energy, there would be no worries about gasoline prices. The smiles, the giddiness, and the leaps of joy were something to behold.

There is something about the anticipation of unstructured time, warm days, sleeping a little later, and a possible trip to somewhere new that makes the heart dance with joy. And I'm not just talking about the students; on the last day of classes, more than a few staff also bounce to their cars with smiles on their faces.

While we hope everyone has time to enjoy this special season, we also know it provides an opportunity for students to experience other types of learning. There is tremendous value in reading a book for pleasure and not because it is assigned. Walking in the woods, sitting by a lake, and taking time to notice our natural world can refresh the spirit so that, come late August, we have the energy to jump start us into the next school year. Unstructured time is something to treasure, especially for children. Time to reflect and play is critical in helping them develop into unique and balanced individuals.

Adults, too, benefit from more unstructured time. Summer often affords a few more hours to be outside enjoying the beautiful Barrington area. There is a carefree quote by James Dent: “A perfect summer day is when the sun is shining, the breeze is blowing, the birds are singing, and the lawn mower is broken.”

Of course, there are plenty of opportunities for quality structured experiences as well. Many students trade their school backpacks for summer sports camps, a special art class, or music camps. Many take advantage of over 100 summer school classes offered in District 220, with enrollments

approaching 5,000. Classes that not only include the basics in reading, writing, and math, but also include courses such as Getting Ready for Kindergarten, Meet Artists, Reading Lalapalooza, Middle School Technology Camp, Robotics, Drama, Film and Literature, Teen Cooking, 6th-Grade Preview, Health, Introduction to Business, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Video Production, Woodworking, Photography, and Independent Living, as well as athletic camps for almost every sport.

Although classes officially ended June 5, Barrington School District employees continue their hard work during the summer months preparing for the 2008–2009 school year. Students remain the focus of district teachers, administrators, and support staff throughout June, July, and August.

The district's continual efforts to improve professional development, curriculum, and instruction make numerous workshops available to educators through late summer. These programs meet various needs identified by teachers and cover all subject areas taught in district schools. Conversations and priorities of the previous school year – such as strategies to make learning more engaging for individual students and discussing author Madeline Levine's *The Price of Privilege* – continue in earnest during the vacation months and into next fall. Dr. Levine's book is a powerful reminder to us that “kids need plenty of opportunities to dream about and work out the details of their future selves.” What better time than summer to relax the hectic schedule of school, work, clubs, and lessons?

In addition, Barrington teachers attend graduate school, tutor students, and work in their classrooms throughout the summer. Our principals take advantage of the reprieve to advise new teachers, assign students to classrooms, plan staff development activities for the year, and finalize the master calendar for their schools.

Meanwhile, many other district employees also prepare Barrington schools for the return of students in late August. From the maintenance and custodial workers who complete summer repairs to the food service staff, which plans for meals, everyone focuses on the opening of a new school year.

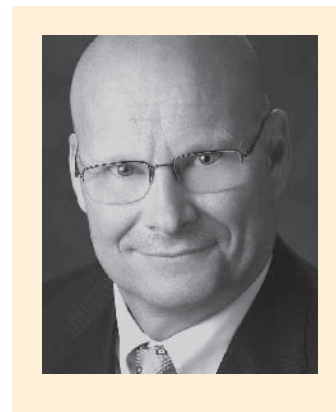


PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

Dr. Tom Leonard is the superintendent of District 220 schools.

Each summer, Barrington's maintenance and custodial staff strips, refinishes, or cleans millions of square feet of tiled or carpeted floor space. Most of the district's custodians work year round and spend the summers washing the furniture, lockers, windows, and outside walk areas. The custodians also assist the principals in relocating some classrooms and furniture so everything is ready for students when they return on August 26.

From summer school programs for students to staff development sessions for educators, Barrington schools remain active hubs of continual learning, even during the time when families take their traditional vacations. Although your local school may appear quiet right now, preparations continue for another great year when the success of all learners once again becomes the focal point in District 220.

So as you enjoy your summer, I wish you time to learn, time to take care of a few lingering tasks, time to sit down with a good book, time to connect with family and friends, time to enjoy your environment...and at least a little time when the sun is shining and the lawn mower is not working.

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