

# August

## *Aspirations*

### **THEME**

Aspirations: Share your vision for the school and bring the staff together to set and promote your schoolwide goals and action plan

### **To Do**

Communicate your vision for the school—one that encompasses what the school community *is*, and what it aspires to *become*; include schoolwide goals for the year ahead

Define and reiterate the school's core values and how colleagues will interact to reach shared objectives: What do we believe about teaching and learning?

Meet and orient new teachers, students, families

Plan for open house

Plan back-to-school meetings with staff

Prep for student registration and balance class loads; be prepared for scheduled and unscheduled meetings with parents

### **OTHER**

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### CONSIDER THIS: INSIGHTS AND TIPS FROM AWARD-WINNING PRINCIPALS

We review our school mission and belief statements together in August, before the students arrive. I ask the staff to “recall” our mission statement by using a “fill-in-the-blank” review to see how much they’ve internalized. It does no good to have a mission statement unless we can assimilate and verbalize to others what we are all about.

We also have a staff mini-retreat before school begins. We make it a point to go away somewhere—to a state park, or hotel with a meeting place—so we are together for 2–3 days and can talk all about school without interruptions. It’s important to plan as much collegial team-building time as work time. I always make sure the accommodations are nice and the food is great to thank them for their hard work. I give them lots of shopping time and plan fun activities together in the evenings. This is an excellent way to help staff members get to know each other better, with no pressure to perform, especially the new teachers. We carefully analyze data from the previous year to set goals for the upcoming year. By the end of the retreat, we’re all on the same page at the same time, right before school starts—it helps us be cohesive and collegial from day one.

—Bruce Haddix  
2005 NAESP Distinguished Principal  
Center Grove Elementary School, Greenwood, IN

When the teachers come back in August, my administrative team and I plan our special event for the first day of school—this day is the students’ first impression of our school, and over the years, we’ve made it into a very memorable and fun experience for them. We welcome 320 new seventh graders each fall, and we want to make a lasting impact on their very first day in middle school. So, we host an assembly we call the “Kumu [Hawaiian for teacher or leader] on Parade.” In this assembly on the first day of school, every adult who affects the life of the children in the coming year—teachers, custodial and maintenance staff, librarians, dining hall

workers, secretaries, administrators—is introduced individually and walks once around our gymnasium, ending by taking a bow and receiving applause. This year even some of our board members and central office administrators participated. The first-day assembly culminates with all the adults joining together to do a dance. One of our teachers is a professional ballroom dancer and choreographs the dance, and we all spend a couple of days learning the steps before the first day. This year we had a western theme for the year, so we all did a line dance for the children, but every year it's something different and every year, we all have to learn a new dance! The assembly is a wonderful, positive way to start the year with a spirited welcome. High school students come back to the middle school and tell us they still remember the Kumu on Parade even after they graduate, with fond memories of being introduced to the adults who care about them, and then having all the adults performing a special dance expressly for them.

—Sandra Jo-Anne Young  
2006 NASSP/MetLife Principal of the Year  
Kamehameha Middle School, Kapalama Campus, Honolulu, HI

Hopefully, your hiring is finished by August, but occasionally you have a last-minute resignation or an opportunity for additional staffing. We do something a little different with hiring of teachers. We include students and parents on our hiring teams. When we have summer school classes in session, we ask teacher candidates to do mini-lessons in the summer program classes happening onsite. Then, we ask the students in the summer school to provide feedback on the quality of the candidates based on the actual lessons. During the year, you can do the same thing with your regular students. It's one thing to see a résumé and another to see a concept taught "live"—I've found it a very effective way to identify and hire excellent teachers.

—Melinda Reeves  
2004 NASSP/MetLife Principal of the Year  
Decatur High School, Decatur, TX

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### WEEKLY INSPIRATIONAL QUOTES FOR AUGUST

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”

—W. B. Yeats

“There is no ‘try.’ Only ‘do.’”

—Yoda

“Good is the enemy of great.”

—Jim Collins

“Treat children as if they were what they should be, and you help them become what they are capable of becoming.”

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

“Courage is being scared to death—and saddling up anyway.”

—John Wayne

### WEEKLY REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS FOR AUGUST

This month’s theme centers on “aspirations.” Looking ahead, where do you want your school to be—compared to where you left off in June—when the school year ahead comes to a close? What are three measurable schoolwide goals for the coming year? How will you know whether you’re making progress toward these goals?

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For some teachers and students, the start of school involves considerable anxiety. What do you do to identify and support those individuals in your

school community for whom “saddling up” for the first days of school is a tremendous stressor?

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One of the monthly quotes asserts that “good is the enemy of great.” Sometimes it is difficult to push for excellence when influential members of your staff and faculty feel things are “good enough” as is. Who are these individuals on your faculty and staff? How will you motivate them?

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List three new, creative, fun strategies for recognizing the accomplishments of your staff, school volunteers, and students, motivating them in the upcoming year.

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How strong is the leadership team at your school? What uncertainties or needs do you and your administrative team have heading into this

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school year? How do you intend to address the concerns and support the needs?

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