

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR: Celebrate the end of your school year

By Michele Mattoon, NSRF® National Facilitator, and NSRF Director,
michele@nsrcfharmony.org

When I was teaching, the school years seemed to be punctuated by certain milestones on the calendar: the first day of school, winter break, spring break, the beginning of a new semester, standardized test time, finals, and evaluations. As the end of the school year approached I was often stopped by well-meaning people declaring, “Aren’t you excited? It’s the last week of classes! Now, you get to relax and enjoy your summer!”

I would give that person a smile and keep myself from launching into all the tasks I still had to cram in those last weeks, and then all the meetings to attend after school was over, not to mention the amount of time I had to spend on professional development during the summer.

It took a few weeks after the last day of school for me to begin the process of relaxing and refueling. Occasionally, whoever was in charge of leading our

year-end meetings would strive to create some sort of positive bonding experience for us.

Unfortunately, much of our meetings were taken up with once again worrying over what didn’t work that year or stressing out about all the stuff that was going to be expected of us the next year. Mostly we’d hear a token, “Good work, folks!” before we cleared out of the building.

With that in mind, it’s not surprising that May is the month that I’m frequently asked if NSRF® has any protocols or activities that would be “a good way” to end the school year. Lately, I have become more conscious of the need for intentional celebration as we review our past. So much of what we do as professionals in the education field is about identifying, analyzing, and correcting what hasn’t gone well. Of course, this is an important process when it comes to

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striving for continuous improvement.

However, if a school only concentrates on what went wrong, it can create a depressing culture of mistrust and resentment. When staff is constantly judged to be lacking, it's no surprise that they will feel beleaguered and unappreciated.

I urge you to take some time at the end of the school year to look back and celebrate the many things that were done right. By engaging in this way, we not only give ourselves a well-deserved pat on the back, but more importantly, we gain respect for our fellow faculty. Hearing the successes of others reveals to us the wonderful things that are happening in our school. It reminds us that, most days, more things go right than go wrong. Upon hearing these stories, we feel a renewed sense of hope and purpose. We believe that we can make a difference and become advocates for each other's successes. Regularly scheduling time to celebrate successes can promote a healthy school culture by building trust one positive story at a time. Here are three of my favorite ways to end the school year:

1. Success Analysis with Reflective Questions: The [Success Analysis with Reflective Questions](#) allows the group to hear stories of other's successes and, also, to share one of their own. The idea is to listen to the success through the lens of learning from it. We ask ourselves questions such as, "What exactly did this person do to ensure their success?" and "How can we apply these tools to our work so that we will become more successful?" After completing the protocol in triads, the participants in each small group can quickly share a one-sentence description of their success in a large group. Hearing 30 successes from 30 different people is bound to leave everyone end-

ing the school year on a high note.

2. Celebration Share Activity: This activity was specifically designed to give people a structured way to celebrate successes. It involves each individual brainstorming as many successes as they can think of over a period of time (let's say a school year). Then, participants are directed to share some of those successes with each other in pairs and then with a larger group. All successes are charted so they can be admired and celebrated. Go you! Go team!

3. Chalk Talk: The versatile [Chalk Talk](#) is another wonderful way to silently share successes. Post several pieces of chart paper on a wall with the general question, "What were all our successes this year?" For large groups, divide up the chalk talks into divisions or grade levels—including administrators and non-teaching staff. After the Chalk Talks are complete, save time for people to verbally share their favorites. Keep the Chalk Talk chart papers up on the walls, to revisit at the beginning of the next school year. Invite parents to read them during an open house, or take pictures of them and include the photos in a school newsletter next year.

All these activities can be done with students as well. What a rewarding way to end a school year—remembering our learnings, triumphs, and accomplishments. After all, it is important to acknowledge that you really have come a long way!

Happy summer!



Michele Mattoon, NSRF Director