

Your Personal Mentoring &
Planning Guide For

The Last 60 Days
Of The School Year

FINISHING STRONG

A stylized illustration of a hand holding a megaphone. The hand and arm are rendered in a light gray silhouette. The megaphone is black with a white rim. From the top of the megaphone, a cluster of black stars of various sizes is flying out, suggesting a shout or a call to action.

By Robert L. DeBruyn

Author of *The MASTER Teacher*

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Introduction

We all know how important it is to have a strong finish in athletics: Many a game is lost in the fourth quarter or the ninth inning. And many runners lead the race until they approach the finish line. A strong finish is just as important to the classroom teacher. The last weeks of school are not a time to slow down. They are not a time to lose enthusiasm for learning—or to lower expectations. Indeed, we must teach until the last minute of the last day.

Many times, a year is ruined during the last weeks of school. One thing is certain: Finishing the year strong can help you do the thing you want most to do—teach.

This book is designed to make the last weeks of school memorable and productive for students and teachers alike. It was written to enhance your professional success in the last 60 days. Reading and applying each lesson will help you have a great finish to the school year. It can also help you grow professionally.

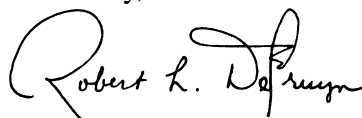
To actually acquire and apply knowledge, it's important to write what you learned as well as what you already knew. Likewise, it's essential to reflect and determine what worked and didn't work. When reflection and learning are followed by adjustments, that is, what you will do differently as well as when you will do it, you will learn and grow from your professional experiences.

The lessons in this book are in compliance with the core principles of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. As you use the personal journal, you will find that it not only serves you during your first year in education, but can become your guidepost for every school year throughout your career. Simply write your journal entry after reading each chapter, and apply what you've learned in the classroom.

As educators, our careers must center on lifelong learning and reflect the distinguishing characteristics of lifelong learners. Lifelong learners continue to learn, to apply what they have learned, to review and reflect on the results of that application, and to make adjustments that contribute to their professional improvement and growth. This book will help you achieve these professional goals.

You have my best wishes for a great finish to the school year—and for a great career.

Sincerely,



Robert L. DeBruyn
Author of *The MASTER Teacher*

CHAPTER 1

Time To Initiate A Plan For A Strong Finish

By this point in the year, we probably believe students understand us, how we function, and our expectations. Yet, some things are understood; some are not. And how we would like students to end the school year may be one thing they don't understand. Unless we initiate a plan for a strong finish, we're not likely to have one. That's because our students are all apt to have different expectations and perceptions regarding the last weeks of school. And those expectations and perceptions often are based on their experiences from years past or the priorities of a summer vacation. There are at least seven actions we must take to orchestrate a strong finish.

Tell students how far they have come since the beginning.

First, at least once each week—until the final class—remind students where they started and how far they have come academically and socially, as well as in attitude and effort. This action is a must. Remember, confirmation of progress is an ongoing and uplifting motivator.

Second, be precise when reminding students of all the attitudes and actions that have gotten them to this point. We might say, "These are the reasons for your success. Do not abandon these characteristics in the last days of school. Build upon them. Perfect them." Then say, "These are the characteristics that have readied you for the last weeks of school—and have prepared you for next year."

Third, lay out both a daily and weekly plan of achievement for the final days of school. Students must know about and understand the plan, the need for it, and the achievement that is expected. If your plan makes sense and students see its benefits, it will be accepted. If

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Lined area for taking notes.

it is seen as unreasonable or serving your demands more than it helps students, it will not. Therefore, pinpoint the tasks to be done and give precise expectations and explanations—verbally and in writing.

Fourth, resist the urge to change the rules of the game—especially now. If you want to guarantee a troubled ending, all you need to do is change your expectations, initiate new procedures, install new rules, or change your approach—from the ways you collect papers to how you begin class. This is not a time for change. Rather, it is a time to maintain high productivity and bring a successful closure to the class.

Make it a point to communicate more frequently at the end of the year.

Fifth, communicate “beyond the call of duty” during the last weeks of school. And do so in a positive, upbeat, and enthusiastic way. Remember, work and pressure may be mounting in many places for students. And some students have more on their plate and a longer list of priorities now than at any other time of the year. Consequently, it’s easier for students to forget, misinterpret, just not hear, or become overwhelmed by what they are told. Therefore, you must communicate calmly, seriously, and thoroughly. Above all, you must not think saying something once will work. It won’t. However, acting as helping and reassuring partners will—even with those students who have achieved the least.

Sixth, celebrate work, effort, improvement, and success frequently. This action is vital to building students’ confidence with each passing day. If you fail to take such action—on a daily basis—you’ll look up one day and find that some students, even some of those who were doing well, have been left behind in the final busy days of school.

Seventh, remember the importance of relationships. Too often, we get so caught up in the work that needs to be done before school is out that we put relationships on the back burner. We’re checking assignments. We’re grading tests. We’re preparing reports and filling out forms to close school for the summer. And that’s fine—as long as you don’t start thinking in terms of your tasks rather than your relationships with individual students in your classes. We should be especially cognizant of the relationships we have with students who are moving out of elementary school, middle school,

and junior high school. This is a time of uncertainty. Relationships are very, very important to those students at this time. They need reassurance.

The Master Teacher believes that high productivity and achievement should be our goal in the final weeks.

The Master Teacher wants a strong and productive finish to the school year. He or she wants students to be involved in learning until the last day. Yet he or she is very much aware that this is an abnormally busy time for teachers. It is a time of distractions and deviations. After all, we have to keep teaching as well as take care of the multitude of chores that accompany finishing up and leaving school for the summer.

That's why the Master Teacher knows a special plan is needed for the final weeks of school. Without such a plan, both teachers and students can find these final weeks the least productive and most unrewarding of all. That's why our plan of action must include communicating our plan and our expectations—and making sure students see, by both our words and deeds, that school is still in session. They must know that there is much to be achieved in the final days.

The Master Teacher is well aware that students know that summer and vacation are on the horizon. In truth, however, he or she also knows it is often easier to motivate people to work hard for a few days when they know the end is in sight. Having a plan of action that is designed to make sense to students and offer hope and reward always helps us get the job done.

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Personal Learning Journal

This is your personal journal for the last sixty days of the school year. It focuses on a four-step learning process specifically designed to enhance lifetime learning. Every step is important. To actually acquire and remember knowledge, it's important to write what you learned as well as what you already knew. Likewise, it's essential to know what worked and didn't work—and to reflect. When reflection is followed by adjustments, that is, what you will do differently as well as *when* you will do it, long-term learning and improvement are enhanced.

As you use the personal journal, you will find that it not only serves you during your first year in education, but can become your guidepost for ending every school year throughout your career. *Simply write your journal entry after reading this chapter, and apply what you've learned in the classroom.*

I. Learning/Planning

a. What did I already know about this topic?

b. What did I learn that was new?

II. Action/Application

a. What did I do that worked?

b. What did I do that didn't work?

c. What did I *not do*—and what happened?

III. Reflection/Assessment

a. What will I do with what I've learned from my experience?

b. What do I still need to learn about this subject?

c. How can I get this information?

IV. Change/Adjustment

a. What will I do differently the next time?

b. When will I use what I've learned? (last day of school, last week of school, before grade cards go out, etc.)
