

First Day of School Celebrations

Resources for creating a First Day of School Celebration at your school can be found in the **Going Beyond** folder for Chapter 7 at EffectiveTeaching.com.

The most important day to celebrate is not graduation day. Each year, almost one third of all public high school students—and nearly one half of all blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans—fail to graduate from public high school with their class. Many of these students abandon school with less than two years to complete their high school education. For these students there is no graduation to celebrate.

Hard numbers are difficult to pinpoint, but an estimated 500,000 to 1.2 million students drop out of school each year—a tragedy!

Working Together From the Very First Day

Many cities and towns have parades celebrating various occasions—Fourth of July, Memorial Day, St. Patrick's Day, and Chinese New Year. But how many communities join forces to celebrate the first day of school with a parade?

The most important day to celebrate is the first day of school.

The Boaz City School System in Alabama joins the community at large to underscore the importance of education and learning. Celebrating the first day of school is one way it succeeds and merits a reputation as one of the top academic-scoring districts in Alabama.

The Boaz City School System philosophy states that everyone in the community should be involved in the education of its children. And they don't fool around. Broad smiles are seen all around, as everyone in the community is invited to the festivities celebrating, you guessed it, the first day of school!

Kicking off the celebration is the First Day Parade. Thousands of Boaz community members—students, teachers, parents, grandparents, toddlers, and administrators—march in the First Day Parade. The festive air is filled with the sounds of different school bands and school cheers. Pennants wave and school children proudly proclaim their school mascots on street-wide banners.

Teamwork is everywhere. The teachers' organization (Alabama Education Association) designs and orders the annual TEAMBOAZ T-shirts, which are distributed to the entire community. Everyone wears the shirt to the First Day Celebration and on other select occasions throughout the year to underscore the school district's unity of purpose.

The First Day Celebration is a collective effort of the school district, police department, fire department, city council, mayor, and citizens. Everyone works together in planning and executing the celebration.

And what's a parade without food? The delicious scent of grilled hot dogs and hamburgers fill the air, while everyone gathers at a local stadium, hungry and excited to begin another year of learning.

The First Day Celebration is truly a collaborative effort. It takes the *whole village*, the school district, police and fire departments, city council, mayor, and community members working together to plan, execute and fund this wonderful event. By working in concert to celebrate the beginning of school, **the importance of education is clearly understood by all.**

First Day of School Celebrations (continued)

The “First Day of School Celebration Handbook” offers ideas for creating a First Day Celebration. The document includes program examples, sample letters (invitations, request, etc.), a collection of First Day stories, frequently asked questions, and planning checklist. It is available in English or Spanish. **Developed by the First Day Foundation, the handbook can be downloaded for free by [clicking here](#).**

Nic Clement, a superintendent of schools in Arizona, sent us a story that appeared in the *Arizona Daily Star* on August 8, 2008. We’ve adapted and paraphrased it to share with you.

The Flowing Wells Unified School District of Tucson, Arizona, kicks off its school year with a celebration honoring its Teachers of the Year. There’s no perfunctory handshake, or self-congratulatory round of applause.

Quite the contrary, the celebration honors teachers, support staff, and bus drivers. The honorees are dressed in costumes and they parade around the auditorium before they go on stage to receive their awards in front of 325 returning colleagues. A raucous cheer welcomes them back at this first day celebration.

Even district administrators come in costume to the themed event. This year’s celebration was titled “The Experience” and featured administrators dressed in Indiana Jones-style garb.

Superintendent Nicholas Clement was “Indiana Clement” when he addressed the staff. He extolled the district’s culture of personalized learning, including opportunities for all students to participate in after-school activities and the astounding customer service offered to parents and students.

High school students pitched in by providing the entertainment, building the sets, and working as the tech crew. They spent more than 25 hours building the event’s Indiana Jones set, which included a background, podium, and temples.

But the highlight of the event occurred when fellow teachers and staff recognized the district’s top teachers.

“Part of the experience is having fun and celebrating our teachers and our support staff,” Clement said. “It’s valuing each other, which then translates into valuing our customers—that’s the purpose of getting everybody together.”

The district’s Teachers-of-the-Year, Support-Staff Employee-of-the-Year, and Bus Driver-of-the-Year were honored. A physical education teacher was unabashedly decked out in a jersey, and her head was topped with a basketball net as part of her *recognition*. She had to complete a series of physical-fitness activities, including using a plastic hockey stick to score a goal, before she joined the other winners on stage.

She said, “I knew something was coming because that’s how our assemblies work; but it’s all in good fun. It’s a fun way to start the year and energize everybody. It’s a good, positive experience.”

Students get the pep assemblies and rallies, but for the teachers, this is the one time when they are the focus of all the excitement and they get to be goofy.

Teachers and staff at each of the schools organize the tributes to their winning teachers. This year the junior high staff wore bright yellow T-shirts bearing the award-winning teacher’s name and a quote from Lisa Simpson of *The Simpsons*, “Ugh, I am sick of everyone being so proud of me.”

It's all about pride and achievement for all the people in the Flowing Wells family. This explains why the Flowing Wells Schools of Tucson, Arizona, have produced more Teachers-of-the-Year nominees and winners than any other district in the state!