Social and Emotional Learning

Lesson Title: Finishing the Year Strong
Grade Level: High School

Project and Purpose

Students analyze advice for teachers to finish the school year on a strong note and create a list for themselves and their peers.

Essential Question

What should students do to finish the school year strong?

Materials

- Portions of the article, "How to Finish the School Year Strong" from www.teach4theheart.com (provided)
- Pens
- Tape
- Two pieces of different colored Post-it notes for each student.

Teacher

Note: This lesson should occur near the end of the school year, but before the very last week.

1. Tell students you have noticed their end of year behaviors and you wish you could join them in these same behaviors. Explain that it is just as challenging for teachers as it is for students. Teachers get support to make it to the end of the year from the administration, each other, and sometimes teacher blogs and articles.
2. Form eight groups and tell students they will each receive one piece of advice for teachers from the article "How to Finish the School Year Strong" from www.teach4theheart.com. Their job is to translate that piece of advice into advice for themselves and their fellow students. To do this, they should analyze what the advice means for the teacher and determine if the same advice applies to students. If so, how will they reword the advice? How will they adapt it or create advice that is more appropriate for students?
3. Give the groups time to write their pieces of advice neatly on the same page as the teacher advice.
4. When the groups are done, have them tape their teacher/student advice somewhere in the room where everyone can see.
5. Tell students they will get a chance to vote on the best piece of advice
6. Distribute eight pieces of each color Post-it notes to each student. Determine which color is "best teacher advice" and which color is "best student advice." Have students go around the room silently, read the teacher and the new student pieces of advice, and post the appropriate color note next to the teacher and student advice for a vote. Their votes can be on different pages (in other words, they can vote for advice #4 for teachers and advice #8 for students).

Conclusion

Have students return to their seats, notice the sticky note votes and discuss: What should students do to finish the school year strong?

How to Finish the School Year Strong

1. **Don't coast; instead, be more intentional.** Don't allow yourself to go on autopilot. Instead, choose to be intentional about making these last days count. Set one or two end-of-the-year goals and make it a priority to do all you can to influence your students during these last few days.

How to Finish the School Year Strong

2. **Keep first things first.** When you're overwhelmed and there are a million things to do, remember to keep first things first. Focus on what really matters and realize that the rest will get done eventually. (You might also want to try the intentional procrastinating to-do list system.)

How to Finish the School Year Strong

3. Draw on relationships you've built. You've spent a whole year building relationships with your students and their parents, and as a result, you likely have more influence now than you ever did before. You may never get another chance to inspire them, believe in them, guide them, or counsel them. So take advantage of every opportunity you get to speak the truth and impact their lives.

4. Strategically prioritize what to teach. If you've got way more material to cover than you have time to teach, don't just keep plodding along. Instead, sit down and decide what is most important for them to learn. Then focus on that.

How to Finish the School Year Strong

5. Don't plan to finish teaching too early. For those of you who are right on track and are about to finish your curriculum, I have a word of caution for you – don't finish too early. One of my first years I finished my math curriculum a week early, planning review games for the last week. The problem was that once I told the kids we were done with the book, they turned into crazy people. Well, not really, but it was definitely much harder to keep them focused. Since then, I've scheduled the final test closer to the last day of school.

How to Finish the School Year Strong

6. Communicate with parents. Don't just turn in your final grades and walk out the door. Take the time to have one last communication with the parents of kids who have struggled in your class. Give them suggestions of things they can do over the summer to help prepare their student for the next year. Even if you don't think they'll heed your advice, taking a few moments to send them a final email shows them how much you care about their student.

How to Finish the School Year Strong

7. Try to leave things as organized as possible. Notice I said try. Yes, there's a bazillion things to do, but the more organized you can leave things now, the smoother things will go next fall. So take a few moments to jot down notes for yourself of what worked and what didn't. And maybe even to tackle those disastrous desk drawers. (Do I dare even mention the closet?)

How to Finish the School Year Strong

8. Decide to enjoy these last days. Simple but profound. Instead of counting every moment till you're done, choose to enjoy these last days you have with this group of students. Soon school will be over and you'll be relaxing. But this opportunity – your time with these students – will be done. So choose to enjoy these days while you have them and to view them as a gift. This one mental decision will impact everything else you do.