

This is normally the time of the year when I try to impart some words of wisdom about the holiday season and the end of the year. It's been very difficult for me to even begin to come up with anything new this year that doesn't sound insignificant after the news of the last few days. I sang in a concert designed for children at the Kennedy Center last Sunday and it was so hard to look out at that audience and not start crying because most of us in schools can hardly stop thinking about what happened. Schools are very insulated work places. After we walk in each day, for the most part the rest of the world disappears. We have no TV playing, no radio on. We may check the weather on the internet once in a while, especially during storm season, but in a sense the rest of the world vanishes as we make your children our focus. And that is how it should be. We live in their world as they grow and develop and prepare to join the adult one. For these few years school is their place, designed to meet their needs. Anything that destroys that world is what makes dealing with our emotions so hard.

Like everyone we will be looking at our security measures. Of course everyone is talking about beefing up how people enter buildings. Lafayette has some challenges with so many students now in portable buildings who are coming and going all day long. That is just the building. Ten years ago we endured a month of indoor recess when the sniper was out there. How does a school really secure its grounds from every eventuality? I don't know and I don't think anyone else does either.

I'm writing this before the children return to school so I can't comment on what happened Monday. But our intention is to have as normal a week as possible at Lafayette. Of course that includes holiday parties and winter concerts. The Wilson High School chorus is coming to perform. The first grade is going to the White House to see the decorations. On Friday the valuable life skill of cleaning will be on display as desks and lockers are emptied, trash is thrown out and we get all set for January.

Over the break remember to have your child read every day. A trip to the library or bookstore would be a nice outing. There are wonderful new children's books out there. Most everyone is practicing some set of facts right now. My mother made me write my times tables every morning one summer before I could go out and play. Hated it at the time but I learned those facts cold. Find other places where they can practice some math. Use calorie counts on packages to figure out how many calories a meal contains. Do some cooking. Riding metro? What is the cost going to be for our trip? Many of your children know how to access various websites where they can continue working on programs they have been using at school. Sometime spent on them would be nice. Keeping a vacation journal is a way to keep writing. Even your kindergarten students know how to do this. Just let them write down what ever letters they think work and then draw a picture. They are doing this all the time at school now.

I know I'm looking forward to some time off. For many years my winter breaks have been spent dealing with aging parents. This year we are the old people in both our families. So we are going to spend some much needed time at home doing some sorting and purging of our own stuff. We have way too much stuff. A few dinners out and

sleeping past 5 a.m. will be nice. I have the auction quilt to finish. Maybe even a nap or two. Nice to have such simple expectations.

And then 2013 will start and we will be back for the rest of the school year. January is the 40th anniversary of the start of my first teaching job. I graduated in December and walked into my first class room one month later. I took some time off when my children were born so no, I haven't put in 40 total years. But I can still feel those butterflies in my stomach each and every school year wondering what the new year will bring that I felt that day in Grand Prairie, Texas at Adams Middle School. How can this have happened? Where did the time go? Once I had a child ask me how to get to be old. I jokingly said keep waking up each morning and don't stop breathing and you will get to be old. How true! So my wish for you and your children this year is to enjoy every minute of this break in your normal routine. Spend time on fun things as well as tasks that just need to be done. Read more bedtime stories, watch some movies together, play board games, get out a deck of cards and teach them to play Gin or Spades. Do stuff together. And give them a few extra hugs and kisses and then a few more. Have a wonderful holiday season. See you in January.