

# **Chapter One**

# ARE YOU CRITICALLY REVIEWING LAST YEAR'S RESULTS?

"Failing to Plan Is Planning to Fail"
—Author Unknown

elcome to the paranoia of July. Principals are expected to complete every task associated with an orderly closing for the present school year. At the same time, they must concentrate their efforts to ensure a smooth opening for the upcoming year. The principal who can have a free mind and relax during the vacation period is truly a miracle worker. We freely admit to frequently reviewing and adding items to the to-do list while vacationing. It's much easier to be physically removed from one's school than to turn off the planning and anticipation for the new school year.

Many of the monthly tasks we explore in this book have been made more difficult by passage of the No Child Left Behind legislation and the recent accompanying trend of required performance testing.

We have never been proponents of evaluating a child's education by using a single examination. Particularly in the elementary school grades, we have traditionally valued a host of skills that are not always measured by these test results. Intangible items such as a love of learning, an appreciation of the arts, respect for teachers and fellow students, and the development of good study habits are currently becoming irrelevant. The opportunity for staff members to explore enrichment activities by taking time for that "teachable moment" has seemingly been devalued because the academic benefit can't be measured. To survive in this new environment, principals must ensure that their teachers

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#### THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL'S CALENDAR

concentrate on the academic standards that are currently the major measure of evaluating a child's educational performance. Entire grade levels are often evaluated from a single test. Although states may differ in the manner in which their examinations measure performance, sadly, all teachers are presently encouraged to "teach to the test."

We have added several topics to this new edition of the book that serve as reminders to staff members about upcoming standardized tests. Obviously, it is recommended that principals closely monitor teachers' lesson plans to verify that their instructions are focused on assessment topics and other materials that are required for their grade levels. Whether principals support this new emphasis on testing or not, they are required to do everything in their power to address these new academic requirements. The monthly tasks will hopefully direct principals toward the fulfillment of these new essentials, but we will also hold steadfast to our belief that young children should receive a more wholesome and well-rounded educational experience.

In New York State a schedule has been released for all grades that provides schools a two-week window for administering new examinations required under the No Child Left Behind Act. Think of grades 3–5 youngsters required to take the English Language Arts examination during the week of January 9–13 and the Mathematics test during the period of March 13–17. Fourth graders must additionally be evaluated by a Science exam on or about April 10–12. Even though we may believe this is overkill, principals are encouraged to help their staffs prepare the children for these examinations by observing classes, ensuring that lesson plans are directed toward the standards, and increasing their inservice initiatives. Although July is supposed to be a vacation month, most elementary school administrators must begin to consider how to best prepare their teachers for these new challenges.

The month is also a time of reflection. The question most principals will ask themselves is, "How can I improve upon everything I did last year?" The exploration must include items that were done well and others that didn't meet one's expectations. Effective principals should have their own monthly files in which they note ways to improve every activity that was held during the past school years. Because the academic year's monthly calendars are very repetitious, these evaluations and suggestions from previous events should be studied when planning the activity the following year.

A week before the start of a new month of school, we recommend that the principal, assistant principal, and school secretary meet and review the monthly folder from the previous year. With that information in hand, the building's principal should consider past items and upcoming events while constructing the weekly memoranda for faculty members. Activities such as field trips, PTA meetings, grade-level inservice opportunities, assembly programs, report card due dates, faculty meetings, and other events are noted far in advance of their scheduled date. Principals who are well organized and anticipate future events maximize the efficiency of their teaching staffs. The faculty is able to concentrate on teaching when the principal eliminates surprises and most annoying classroom interruptions.



#### **JULY'S KEY TASKS**

#### Summer School ■

The era of elementary summer school aping private camp activities is over. The contemporary emphasis on standards and the end of social promotions in most states have caused a restructuring of the elementary summer program. We recommend that the regular school principal be involved in all of the planning for the summer curriculum. Ideally, meetings are held in the early spring to ensure appropriate goals for the summer school principal and staff.

The summer school committee would

- Determine the emphasis of the program.
- Ensure the disciplinary rules of the regular school are followed.
- Decide how the regular school teachers will be informed about each student's progress.
- Make certain the educational tone of the building does not suffer when there is an extracurricular component.
- Work cooperatively with the custodial staff and enable them to perform their regular maintenance duties to make certain the building is ready for the opening of school.

Personal Commentary/Notes:		
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#### **Curriculum Projects** I

Summer projects in which teachers revise curriculum and update grade-level academic responsibilities are essential in this era of standardized testing. After doing an item analysis of test results, the faculty should attempt to review materials for the topics that were poorly answered by their students. Our one concern with the material created during summer projects is the timeliness in which they are presented to the faculty. Excellent projects that don't get into the hands of the staff at the start of school have their value seriously diminished. Due dates should be strictly adhered to by the writers. Administrators or teachers in charge should daily monitor their progress.

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#### Review and Submit Final Teacher Evaluations

The sudden quiet of July and the lack of telephone interruptions allow the principal to review the progress and status of each staff member. Before submitting the evaluations to the appropriate member of the central office staff, the

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principal should formulate each teacher's objectives for the following year. These goals should be discussed with all staff members as part of their final evaluation conferences. The final evaluations of nontenured teachers should be submitted in May to allow the district officials to make rehiring and dismissal decisions. Also, when writing a July letter to the entire staff, we recommend that some personal comments be added to thank individual staff members for their extraordinary effort during the past school year.

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#### ■ Meeting With the Head Custodian

After fully evaluating your custodial leader, the summer agenda should be explored. Minimally, the following topics should be discussed:

- The vacation schedule of each custodian
- The cleaning and painting schedule
- Special projects or construction activities
- The relationship with the summer school principal and students
- A joint walk-through of the entire building to add or delete projects
- Review of safety procedures and school security
- Review of the custodial staff members' evaluations
- Ways to ensure the security of the building during the summer
- Refilling all fire extinguishers
- Maintenance of boilers and cafeteria equipment

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#### **■** Examine and Review Testing Results

Reviewing the academic testing results is a necessity for the school's principal. The process allows for an objective analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the school's scores. The principal can now plan the inservice program for the following year. If last year's students were unprepared for certain topics, the staff should be instructed to include that material in their lesson plans for the following year's students. Positive results should also be reported to the faculty and used to compliment them, which may serve to motivate future endeavors. These results must be transmitted to the central office staff since they will ultimately be discussed in the principal's final evaluation.

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#### Analyze Trends of Disciplinary Referrals

Reviewing disciplinary data ensures the principal that his or her perceptions are accurate. One's feelings are important, but objective data, such as the number of disciplinary referrals, serve to validate one's impressions. The key is to honestly evaluate the present disciplinary procedures. If the data indicate a marked increase in student behavior problems, a reexamination of the present process should be undertaken. In this case, the principal should establish a discipline improvement committee or engage an expert consultant to help analyze the present procedures and make recommendations for improving the process. An elementary school with poor disciplinary procedures is a discredit to the school's principal. No defensive rationale is acceptable.

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#### **Analyze School Population Changes**

America's demographics are changing dramatically. Every large American city presently has minority citizens as the majority population. Latino families comprise almost 40 percent of America's school population. These demographic changes should be addressed. The creation of programs to reach out to foreign-born parents is necessary because this population generally does not get involved in school activities. Proactive activities need to be developed to acquaint immigrant populations with the school's culture, educational offerings, human services, and extracurricular programs.

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#### Review and Revise the Student Handbook

The competent principal keeps copious notes throughout the year and uses them as a resource for updating the student handbook. The rewriting process has been made easier with the advent of computers. A member of the clerical staff can complete the overhaul of the book in a short time. These changes will incorporate the many notes the principal has added to the student handbook file during the previous school year. Changes in the disciplinary progression, additions and deletions of extracurricular activities, the cost of school lunch, and requirements for Student Council participation are areas one principal noted for change in the new handbook.

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#### **■** Update the Teacher Handbook

Recent legal settlements require that the teacher handbook be extremely specific and updated annually. Court challenges to disciplinary decisions are readily defeated by procedures delineated in the teacher or student handbook. Once evidence is provided that all teachers and students were informed of the consequences of poor behavior, school districts are often not held liable.

The process of improving the teacher handbook should include faculty members since they are impacted by what is included. Teachers may also suggest additions to the handbook based on feedback received from their colleagues. The benefit for newly hired staff members is immeasurable. It becomes an important guide and thus should be distributed to them as early as possible. We recommend that all new teachers evaluate the handbook during the middle of their first year of employment. They, more than anyone, will be able to recommend additions and deletions. (See Resource A, Teacher Handbook.)

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#### Review Policy Manuals

Reviewing policy manuals is a task that is easily overlooked during the academic year. The principal should review both building and board policies, with special attention given to new or revised policies. The effects of items such as new requirements, new state mandates, changes in child abuse reporting regulations, Megan's Law notification, smoke-free environments, new curricula, and the disciplinary code are examples that may require a meeting with the superintendent.

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#### Develop a Mission Statement

A formal, written mission statement should be in place before any school improvement efforts are undertaken. This helps avoid a haphazard approach to school improvement in which numerous, sometimes conflicting efforts occur simultaneously and the staff members are drained of vital energy and motivation. (See Resource B, How To Build a Mission Statement.)

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#### Review Mission Statement

Reviewing and revising a mission statement is not to be done unilaterally. Creating a committee to review the validity of the school's mission statement is

worthwhile. Although we suggest that principals examine their mission statements after the close of the school year, we would hope the revisions will be completed by a committee early in the new semester. In September, teachers are highly motivated and have enormous energy. The revised mission statement can be a constructive guide toward developing future school improvements.

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#### Review and Revise Administrative Responsibilities

We are all frequently married to tradition. The superintendent of schools has a table of organization for the district. A thorough analysis of the staff and line responsibilities of each administrator ensures that every person and subject area are being appropriately supervised. Shifts in responsibility can be made to improve supervision, adjust workloads, or to conform to revised state mandates and laws. With frequent budget shortfalls, the principal would be wise to plan for a reduction in staff and how it would have the least effect on the building's table of organization.

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#### Attend Monthly Board of Education Meetings

Whether required by your superintendent or not, we advise all principals to attend monthly board of education meetings. If given the opportunity to speak, take advantage of the moment and compliment your teachers, parents, aides, custodians, and secretaries. Your presence allows you to hear community residents, board members, and central office personnel give their opinions, compliments, and criticisms. If incorrect information is stated about your building or staff, it can be addressed immediately. In that way any newspaper reports will be accurate. Most of all, it is a rare opportunity to present the best possible perspective of your school and faculty to your entire community. It is a valuable public relations format, and you must be an active participant.

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#### Finalize Staff Appointments I

Wherever possible, hiring teachers and ancillary staff members should be completed in the early spring. This enables the principal to provide some inservice and curriculum materials to the new staff members. Often, late hiring decisions occur when budgets are problematic, teachers become ill or apply for maternity leave, and when certain positions are difficult to fill. This is a topic

that will automatically be carried over to August and even September if necessary.

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#### Review the Master Schedule and Room Assignments

The duty to review and perhaps revise the master schedule and room assignments haunts every principal during both the months of July and August. Even though the process was completed in the spring, changes are made for a variety of reasons. One change generally creates a "ripple effect" on the master schedule. For example, a new teacher may be better suited for a different grade level. Changing the assignment necessitates calls to other staff members whose schedules may have to be adjusted. Like the United States Constitution, the master schedule is a "living document."

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#### **■ Examine School Statistics**

Data such as the number of students at or above grade-level expectations should be examined. Principals should review standardized tests' results and year-end grades. Significant changes and trends should be reflected in school-wide goals for the upcoming school year. Trends should be discussed with staff and district curriculum supervisors. Where necessary, inservice courses should be developed to target areas in need of improvement. These courses should also assist teachers with learning any new skills required to address increased emphasis on higher academic standards.

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#### ■ Assess Each Grade Level Status

Now is the time to assess the quality of each grade level's staff. When state examinations are given in fourth grade, principals have a tendency to overload that grade level with their best teachers. We recommend that principals make their staff members understand that these examinations test materials that are taught in every grade. Yes, we will be certain to have good teachers assigned to classes that are being tested, but quality members of the faculty should be assigned to all grades. Balancing teacher expertise when teaming individual grade levels is an important administrative skill. Expert staff members who are adept at teaching basic skills in the earliest grades may be primarily responsible for creating the success of children taking examinations in higher grade levels.

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#### **Hold Parent Meetings** ■

Meeting with parents can be both a thank-you opportunity for the parents' past efforts and a motivational meeting for the new school year. It allows principals to give an orientation to their new PTA officers and begin to discuss potential programs for the following year. Volunteer parents might be secured to help with activities in August such as the new-teacher orientation program, kindergarten registration, and hosting building tours for new students and their parents.

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#### Review School Calendar

Avoiding conflicts is an administrative priority. Examining the entire district's calendar to make certain that one school's events do not conflict with another school's is an essential process. Parents often have children in more than one school, and thus administrators should determine that events such as open houses are hosted on different evenings. Similar safeguards should be instituted for parent conferences, PTA meetings, board of education meetings, and all major school activities.

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#### **JULY'S COMMUNICATIONS**

#### Letter to Staff

July is an excellent time to thank the entire faculty for their extraordinary efforts during the past school year. Sometimes in the haste to close down in June, there simply isn't time to offer appropriate accolades. In the quiet of the principal's summer office, a well-thought-out message to the entire staff should be composed and mailed in a timely fashion. Hopefully, the letter will instill pride in all those who work with the building's children and give everyone a sense of satisfaction for a job well done.

The letter can also inform the staff about the ongoing curriculum projects, scheduled building improvements, and the acquisition of new equipment. In

August, another letter will serve as a reminder of the start of the school	ol calen
dar, meeting times, and opening activities.	

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#### ■ Letter to Incoming Kindergarten or Pre-K Class

There is no summer letter more anxiously awaited than the one written to the parents of your youngest grade level. The parents are usually as nervous as their five- and six-year-olds. The letter serves to allay fears by informing parents about the start of school and the supplies they should purchase for their youngsters. Adding some suggestions about how to discuss the first day of school is also beneficial to concerned parents and their children. An enumeration of such items as arrival time, orientation dates, and summer educational activities that families could organize will be of value. Finally, encouraging parents to call if they have questions and urging them to participate in the August orientation and building walk-through are highly recommended. Mentioning that the principal and staff appreciate and welcome the participation of parents is a necessity.

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#### ■ Early Orientation Letter to New Staff Members

Waiting until August does not take advantage of the potential for planning and the learning time for first-year staff members. They are probably as nervous as your kindergarten parents are and anxious to begin tentative lesson plans. The calm of July offers principals an excellent time to meet new teachers; begin their orientation; and distribute curriculum guides, text books, and teacher handbooks to them.

The letter and invitation to visit will be well received by these young professionals. It's a personal touch that demonstrates that the school's principal is determined for them to succeed. It gives the school leader a chance to anticipate many of their concerns by including the dates and times for the start of school, the new-teacher orientation program, and the school's rules. Some principals invite members from the business office to explain payroll and health benefit options. These agenda items and the thoughtful letter will ensure that new staff members receive a hearty welcome to the school.

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#### Contact the Local Police and Fire Department

This is a perfect time to review emergency drills and disaster plans. Many schools include members of these agencies as guest instructors in the early grades. Trips are also arranged for kindergarten, first, and second graders to visit the fire department and receive initial health lessons and fire safety recommendations.

In the post-9/11 era, we recommend a walk-through with police and safety officials to review all emergency regulations and school procedures. This is particularly important in communities that have volunteer fire fighters and a turnover of leadership.

Most states require as many as twelve fire drills per school year. Safety officials have informed school principals that the building must be evacuated in less than two minutes to avoid serious injury and possible fatalities. This is not an area to be taken lightly. We urge principals to invite fire officials to observe one or more fire drills and make recommendations to improve the strategies for exiting the building. Another good idea is to block a staircase during a drill to make the exercise more realistic and to train teachers to react properly in an emergency. The relationship with these departments could be a matter of life and death.

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#### Membership and Letters to Civic Associations

The service organizations within a school district are important allies. Clubs like Rotary, the Lions, Kiwanis, Elks, and the Chamber of Commerce are all involved in community service and charitable endeavors. Many sponsor school activities, award plaques and certificates, and, at times, offer financial assistance. Joining one or more of these clubs also offers the principal a valuable public relations platform to key members of the community.

These organizations can also make school leaders aware of community projects and trends. This is a two-way partnership. One principal sends every community organization a copy of his PTA correspondence that describes all of the school's activities and special programs. Not a bad idea!

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#### Subscribe to Local Newspapers

Every reason listed previously could be reiterated for connecting with local newspapers. We strongly urge principals to write a weekly column for their local papers to inform all citizens about the school's wholesome and meaningful activities. Information on the honor role, student of the month, and

classroom highlights should also be included. Local newspapers give much of their space to elementary school activities, and your school should be represented. Learning about community services and projects will also build a meaningful school-community partnership. Teachers and PTA leaders should also forward articles to the local press. This communication could also include setting up a summer meeting between the principal and the local newspaper owner or editor.

Personal Commentary/Notes:	
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#### Public Relations Program

A written public relations program has all of the desired outcomes we've mentioned in the summer letters and the obvious need for local involvement with the entire school community. When we polled principals, we learned that the most frequently included items in elementary school "PR" programs are

- Newsletters
- Newspaper articles
- School music performances
- Grandparent/guardian day
- Open school night
- Book fairs
- Charity drives
- PTA meetings and events
- Science fairs
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Letters home
- Picture day
- Art exhibits
- Student-faculty game night
- Board of education presentations

Public relations also includes the way visitors are greeted at your school, the way the secretary answers the phone, and the frequency of teacher-parent contacts. We also recommend that principals host several yearly informal conferences that are open to all parents.

Personal Commentary/Notes:	
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#### **JULY'S PLANNING**

#### Fundraising Activities

We are not advocating that principals make unilateral decisions about fundraising activities. We believe, however, that the school's leader should ensure that these drives are spaced appropriately throughout the school year. For example, in November and December most schools are involved in collecting food and raising money for the less fortunate people in the community. It would be counterproductive to sponsor another type of drive during these months. It is the principal's responsibility to sensitize students, staff, and parents about the appropriate time to host fundraising campaigns. The goal is to construct a conflict-free calendar.

Personal Commentary/Notes: _	 

#### School Trips

Many schools have a few special trips during the school year. The summer is a good time to evaluate whether they remain relevant and educationally sound. Examining field trips to ensure that different grade levels don't go annually to the same destinations can make these ventures more exciting and educational. Having kindergartners and first and second graders go to the Pumpkin Farm each Halloween cannot be justified. If a museum is the trip's focus, teachers should determine the specific exhibits they intend to visit. The exhibits should correspond to the grade level's curriculum. Our recommendation is that field trips should be educationally sound and not merely a day off from school.

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#### The School Calendar

Our principal's school year is from July until June. In some climates it may be from August to July. What truly matters is the principal's ability to block out events to minimize conflicts, overlapping activities, and surprises for the faculty. If a field trip was scheduled for an examination day or a school's major event, staff members will be upset and often demoralized. Last-minute cancellations of events indicate poor planning. This type of skill is often understated in administration textbooks. A principal who plans accurately generally enjoys the confidence of the staff. This book is dedicated to that principle.

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#### **JULY'S PERSONNEL**



#### **■** Finalize Faculty Positions

Little has to be said about the importance of finalizing faculty positions. However, having all positions filled before the principal leaves for vacation allows for an excellent start to the new-teacher orientation program. The teacher would be able to meet with the principal and receive his or her assignment, textbooks, curriculum, teachers' handbook, and student handbook to review during the entire summer. Principals who leave for vacation prior to finalizing staff requirements are assured of having a restless summer. It's very disappointing to return to school and discover that a central office member has hired a new teacher for you whom you've never met.

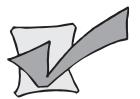
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#### ■ Finalize All Other Staff Positions

Cafeteria aides, secretaries, custodians, and all other nonteaching positions are critical to the efficiency and tone of the school. Principals should be as serious about the interviewing process for these people as they are for the teachers; also, their orientation is as critical as that of the faculty. These staff members must understand that this is a school where the needs of children come first; the students are entrusted to all school workers' joint care when they are on the bus, in the building, in the lunchroom, and on the playground. We admire the school law that stresses that the children are everyone's responsibility from the time they step on the school bus until they exit it near their home. Everyone who works for the principal must feel that responsibility!

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# **JULY'S CHECKLISTS**



# July's Key Tasks and Reminders

	Date	Date	Days on
Major Assignments	Started	Completed	Task
Monitor summer school.			
Review curriculum-writing projects.			
Review and submit final teacher evaluations.			
Meet with the head custodian.			
Examine and review testing results.			
Analyze trends of disciplinary referrals.			
Analyze school population changes.			
Review and revise student handbook.			
Review and revise teacher handbook.			
Review policy manuals.			
Develop a mission statement.			
Review mission statement.			
Review and revise administrative responsibilities.			
Attend monthly board of education meetings.			
Finalize staff appointments.			
Review the master schedule and room assignments.			
Examine school statistics.			
Assess each grade level's status.			
Hold parent meetings.			
Review school calendar for upcoming year.			

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### **July's Communication Checklist**

/	Assignment
	Write letter to staff.
	Write letter to incoming kindergarten or pre-K class.
	Write orientation letter to new staff members.
	Establish contact with local police and fire department officials.
	Establish membership in civic associations.
	Subscribe to local newspapers.
	Develop a public relations program.

## **July's Planning Checklist**

/	Assignment
	Review and coordinate fundraising activities.
	Review and coordinate all school trips.
	Review the school calendar.

# **July's Personnel Checklist**

/	Assignment
	Finalize all faculty positions and teaching schedules.
	Finalize all other staff positions.

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YEAR:

# JULY CALENDAR

MONTH: JULY

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY/SUNDAY
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	_ SATURDAY/SUNDAY_
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	_ SATURDAY/SUNDAY_
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY/SUNDAY
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY/SUNDAY

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