

One of the many things I love about teaching is being given a clean slate each September. I will be given new students who will have varying expectations of me and whose presence will create different group dynamics in classes I have taught previously. I will have a new timetable that will shape my day for the next 10 months.

Come September, I have the renewed opportunity for introspection and to put into practice lessons learned from the previous year. I can also shed practices and habits that did not work.

As summer holidays end, I am both excited and invigorated by the trust given to me to help students become competent and confident young adults.

What do students feel about the start of the academic year?

A survey conducted by kidshealth.org found that concerns about social issues such as fitting in, having friends, being judged or teased, and schoolwork dominate the minds of young teenagers in equal measure, followed by issues surrounding their appearance. This was confirmed in an informal survey I conducted.

Students also look forward to the renewed opportunity they are presented with each academic year. Almost all students I surveyed were replete with good resolutions that centred around "getting better grades", "being more organised" and "getting homework done on time".

Jean Louis Desgouttes, who starts his International General Certificate of Secondary Education course at the French International School, is excited to meet his classmates after a long summer break. He is also keen to meet new students and hear of their experiences from previous schools and places they have lived. However, he is clearly concerned about his academic performance and expresses trepidation over "the time it takes to tank up my brain after relaxing for so long".

His sister Sophie, who starts the last year of her International Baccalaureate Diploma, is also looking forward to "catching up with school friends". However, having visited eight universities in Britain this summer, she says that she's highly motivated to study hard and give her best, because her "first choice university seems within reach".

Socio-emotional changes along with the biological and cognitive changes that students undergo are crucial in defining their social interactions with the world. School is where students learn to develop independent and interpersonal relationships, and it is also where they learn to develop their own identities in relation to others.

Students continue to navigate social relationships as they enter cyberspace. In this Facebook and Instagram era, approval and acknowledgment of a person, idea or sentiment is both easy and instantaneous. Clicking on "like" or "share" is sufficient to provide a seal of social approval and has the ability to expand social media presence and a network of friends.

Research shows students' acceptance or exclusion in these networks and forums where almost everything is

discussed - including homework, group projects and revision techniques - influences students' self-esteem and grades. Hence it is not surprising that "social issues" play on the minds of so many students.

My advice to students as they start this academic year is to formulate a set of goals based on an honest introspection of their own strengths and weaknesses. A good goal is both realistic and measurable, and students should set both personal and academic goals.

Setting nebulous goals such as "getting an A in maths" should be avoided. This overarching goal should be fleshed out into the smaller steps students need to take that culminate in getting that A. These steps could include: not chatting in class, completing homework independently and doing 20 practice questions each weekend. Students are advised to set goals for one term. A year is too long in the life of a teenager.

This academic year will present different challenges to different students. But it will present equally to all students the renewed opportunity of getting one step closer to becoming the best possible version of themselves, both socially and academically. And that is a good goal to have.

Read this article carefully and choose 5 expressions / vocabulary items that you want to learn. Use each of them in a sentence. Underline those expressions / vocabulary items in your sentences.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

You are a Secondary 6 student and as the new school year is about to begin, you are making your resolutions. Write an article of around 400 words with the first paragraph as given below:

*As summer holidays end, I am both excited and invigorated by the thought of the challenges lying ahead. Come September, I have the renewed opportunity for introspection and to put into practice lessons learned from the previous year. I can also shed practices and habits that did not work.*