

(Style on a Dime) End-of-school count down

Written by Marcia Humphrey
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Each night, for the last month or two, one of my three children has been keeping me current on the end-of-school count down. Little do they know, I'm keeping close track myself-I am as ready for them to be finished as they are. We ALL need a break. My oldest child will be an eighth-grader this fall, but lately I have been thinking about how quickly these 13 years have passed by-and how much faster the next five years will zoom before me.

Before I can blink, my firstborn will be finishing her last year of high school and our family will be in senior-year mode --applying to colleges, taking senior pictures, shopping for prom dresses, and planning a graduation party or open house. For those of you who have seniors right now and are still deciding how you can throw a low-cost, casual, low-stress graduation party or open house here are a few ideas designed to get your streams of creativity flowing and to help your graduate feel special for this well-deserved accomplishment.

Send Out Evitations

Rather than buying stamps and writing out envelopes, use a computer to make email invitations, www.evite.com , and send out one message to all your family and friends. Your guests will respond to you by email, which is usually more efficient.

Highlight The Guest Of Honor

If you haven't done so already, gather photos, pictures, awards, and other memorabilia of your grad, from preschool through grade 12, and proudly display them. Set up a table, complete with a beautiful tablecloth, and display various certificates, honors, and ribbons from various extracurricular activities. Consider using the school colors (or your child's favorite colors) to cover a large piece of foam core board. Next, mount pictures and mementos and prop it up against the wall for all to enjoy.

Create A Photo Slideshow w/ Background Music

Using your computer, digital camera, and photo slideshow software, you can easily make a photo slide show and set it to music. If you don't have the skills to do this yourself, but know someone who does, barter services (usually if you are willing to scratch somebody's back, they will scratch yours in return). Just for fun, I googled making photo slide show and discovered the site www.ehow.com and found helpful tips. (You can actually get tips on doing practically anything on this site!)

Have a Gift Box On Hand For Cards

Everyone knows that a graduate's favorite gift, \$\$, always arrives in an envelope. To keep cards from getting lost, plan to have a box, with a top slit, in a designated location. In addition to the cards, provide special stationery and encourage visitors to write words or prayers of encouragement to your son or daughter and deposit them into the box. Your graduate will definitely get that warm and fuzzy feeling when she reviews her special graduation messages.

Feeding the Masses

Let's be honest, the most expensive part of the celebration is always the food. To minimize the cost this time, instead of providing a full spread, like you are accustomed to, opt for the two D's: Desserts and Drinks. A simple and well-stocked dessert menu that includes a mix of cakes, pies, brownies, and fresh fruit will be sufficient. In terms of drinks-coffee (for added flair include flavored creams and shots), tea, punch, pop, and of course good old fashioned (bottled) water. Lastly, have a reliable family member or girlfriend restocking the desserts and drinks as necessary so that you and the grad are free to mix and mingle.

Your child's high school graduation occurs only once in a lifetime. If you want to make it special, yet keep costs down, then stay focused on the big picture-your child's accomplishment and your desire to let him know that he has the love and support of his family and friends as he ventures out to make his mark on the world. At the end of the day, no one will ever remember what was on the menu. Instead they will remember an evening filled with joy and love. Enjoy!

Marcia Humphrey is an interior decorator and home stager who specializes in achieving high style at a low cost. A native of Michigan, she and her husband, Lonnie, have three children.