

Dear Parent/Guardian,

In the midst of this global pandemic, we know that it may not be possible to have your child physically at school full time. We want nothing more than to bring your children back to our schools and engage them in meaningful learning activities. We miss your children. We miss those shared moments of success and the struggles that result in learning breakthroughs. We miss the smiles and watching social skills develop and unfold. We miss the opportunities to see your child play, learn, and grow. But we also want you to remember something very important: you are, and always will be, your child's first and primary teacher.

We will always be here to do our part—to do everything in our power to provide a robust education for your child. But more than ever, we need you. Over the years, we have come to know we can steadily rely on you to make sure your child comes to school on time, fed, clean, well-rested, and with completed homework in hand. We have welcomed with open arms your involvement in school activities, your desire to help run the PTA, your attendance at sporting and cultural events. But now we need you as partners on an even deeper level—as partners in learning and developing the language of learning, with us doing it together as a team.

We know that many of you have full-time employment or other stresses that may come with financial and housing difficulties, with the challenges of looking for work, caring for multiple children, or supporting other friends or family members in need. We also know you were not trained as teachers—that you love your kids but also sometimes admittedly realize they are just not enamored with schooling. We know our government made it compulsory for them to come to school—and that this was in part built around an assumption that as trained teachers we are, on average, better equipped that you may be to handle and navigate the role of educating your children. But this crisis has reminded us again just how valuable and irreplaceable your role is, too.

We are not asking you to become the teacher. We are asking you to partner with us however you are able and to support the learning opportunities we provide. We will continue to learn about what works in education and we will apply our best knowledge, the knowledge generated from decades of research, to build your child's social, emotional, and academic skills.

You are probably hearing a lot of talk about the lost learning during mid-2020 or about what some are calling the "COVID Slide." And there is even more talk about the loss of learning if students are not physically in school immediately. The fact of the matter is, we are teachers and our superpower is knowing where children are in their learning journey and supporting their continued growth. We did not forget how to teach. And our little secret is that about 50 percent of the instructional minutes in school are spent on things that students already know. Thus, this year, our task is to focus on what students need to learn and use the precious time we have with them to focus on that.

We also know that you all went to school and that after 15,000 hours in school, you too are experts and have strong views about school. Some of you did not have great experiences in schooling. Some of you had some brilliant teachers that changed your life course, but some of you missed these marvelous teachers. We realize that you, and our current society, expect much of schools, and schools attempt to solve many problems. Today's schools have a major focus on developing the skills of learning and on finding ways to teach students to work collectively in groups. Employers want graduates to know how to work in teams, to collaborate, to demonstrate high levels of empathy and respect for others, and to be able to "walk in the shoes of others." They want employees with high levels of respect for self and respect for others. We are good at developing these skills, but we need you too.