

Director K – 12
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Dear Parents and Caregivers,

On behalf of the Response Recovery Advisory Committee's Social Emotional Subcommittee, I would like to share the following thoughts. As we approach school opening, teams of community members are joining together to plan to welcome our students back to school. Our new common understanding is that "back to school" has a different meaning now. "Back" may not signify a return or particular date and "school" is no longer solely defined as a place. All around us are new realities whether we welcome change or not. New realities and new routines always have an element of the unknown which, if we are being honest, can be scary. On some level we are all scared. Scared of getting sick, scared of seeing someone we know and love getting sick. We are scared that the world is not adjusting to these new circumstances. Scared that we may not have care for our child if school is not open, or scared because we can't imagine being able to work and educate our children at the same time. Scared that every answer brings unending new questions. No one has all the answers and no one can wave a wand and make everything go back to "normal". Some of us look at change as opportunity and others see uncertainty. None of us know how the world will continue to unfold, but we do know that we want to face whatever comes our way with a sense of optimism and peace, however daunting that may feel. Deep down, we know that is what our children need from us.

As a school community, there are so many variables that we can't control and so many answers that we don't have at this time. Schools are asked to play a role that is far-reaching, beyond educating students in major content areas. At this time, schools are being asked to create solutions based on epidemiology, psychology, education, and nutrition, just to name a few. Each decision point invites innumerable extended questions for the decision-makers, the planners, and those who the plans will impact. All of us seek more control over our environment so we can get to a place further from the anxiety we all feel. As parents, we yearn for our kids to adjust to change with happy hearts and nary a bump or bruise. We often project our own fears on them and worry yet wish that the changes of the world will be easily absorbed. Sometimes we see our fears and anxiety in them and we need support as well.

The good news is that our children possess relentless resilience. Now is a time to observe them and give them support. See what is there and respond. Respond with love and a positive approach to the world. To the extent possible, model calm and mindfulness. Try to be who you want them to be. Approach each question with curiosity and thoughtfulness. **Forgive yourself when none of this is possible.** Parents can't be expected to answer every question, but what we can do is respond in a way that brings stability to the uncertainty. "I may not know how to answer that, but I do know that we will be okay no

matter what the answer turns out to be." Some days that approach is entirely natural and other days it feels like an insurmountable task. As humans we are all experiencing a novel way of being. None of us has lived this particular experience and none of us has the code to turn the world back to the way it was. We are realizing, some more quickly and less begrudgingly than others, that there is no going back. We must move forward and

adapt. We incorporate new ways of thinking into our old framework. We spend time with family and create memories in new ways now.

What our schools can provide at this time is some support for how to greet this vast uncertainty. We want our families to have resources. We know we can never provide all the answers. There is certainly no one resource we can offer that turns the world back in time before the pandemic disrupted us. What we can do is promise we are giving our best. We approach our work with determination and perseverance and we offer our openness and desire to make things better for our families. We are providing information that we hope you find helpful. Each resource we provide we hope is useful in some way, whether it is because it offered a new way of thinking or confirmed there was something you already knew to be true. We are human. We want the best for our kids. **We share the students we serve, they are yours and they are ours.** Let's continue to join together to give them the love, security, and knowledge that their lives, their feelings, and their minds are valuable to us.

Sincerely,

Heather Rodríguez

Director of School Counseling