

To begin, we want to make clear that the remote teaching and learning experiences we had in the spring of 2020 will be unlike the remote teaching and learning experiences which will begin the 2020-21 school year. In the spring we had only days to create and implement tools for instructing our students that were new to staff, students, and families. There were inequities in these methods. There were some successes, but many, many struggles. We were in a completely reactive situation but we all did the best we could. An advantage we had was established relationships between school and home.

As we launch the 20-21 school year we will be meeting new teachers, new students, and new families. We have experienced this distance learning model before and are able to learn from our mistakes and successes. School districts, administrators, and staff have been working diligently around the clock this summer to improve the distance learning model. As teachers we will have intensive training and clear expectations from districts that will guide instruction for teachers and learning for students. With these preparations, we would expect to see more consistency in the teaching and learning from grade to grade and school to school, resulting in a more level playing field for all students.

It is challenging to separate our teacher hats from our parent hats. So, as we share our perspectives and suggestions, we are taking both our professional and personal lives into account.

- **Routine and Structure:** In a classroom, routine and structure are paramount. In a distance learning model this remains crucial for success. As teachers we start on time, are prepared with materials, greet our students personally in a cheerful manner, and set the expectations for the day. As parents we mirror this practice. It is critical that our kids have a designated learning space, know what time we will start, what they will be learning, and when their breaks will happen. We need to establish a positive learning environment to set our kids up for success. This will look different for every family but needs to include limiting distractions and increasing parent/caregiver availability. Teachers must remain flexible to meet student and family needs during this distance learning model. Not every family will have the same schedule.
- **Social Emotional Health:** As teachers we begin and end each class period checking in with our students' emotional needs. We know that when students are overly stressed, emotional, tired, etc. their brains aren't programmed to receive new learning. Especially under these circumstances, our children's social, emotional health must be our top priority. As parents and teachers, we create a climate and relationship with our kids to talk openly and honestly about their feelings. If we need to adjust our schedule and routine to meet an emotional need we do so. Once our kiddo is feeling calm, learning can resume.
- **Communication:** 3-way communication is what makes or breaks distance learning. Parents, teachers, and students all need to be on the same page and communicate openly. When there are successes or struggles, make sure that the teacher is aware. Quick weekly responses to teacher emails or other forms of communication lets them know that you are still engaged in the learning with your child. Teachers struggle with setting office hours. Reach out to your teacher whenever you are able but allow them the flexibility in responding during school hours. Many teachers took time away from their families last spring to respond to school matters at all hours of the day and night. It is in a teacher's nature to want to assist, but we can only do this if we know there is a problem. Keep the lines of communication open.
- **Academics:** Let the teacher be the teacher! As parents, our kids are often less than receptive to our academic support. If your child is struggling with an academic skill, let the teacher know. They are the professionals that know how to analyze mistakes and intervene with appropriate, individualized instruction. We admit, as "teacher parents" this is the hardest one for us. But our home life improved last spring when we had our 5th grader email her teacher rather than having her mom, also a 5th grade teacher, provide the instruction.
- **Technology:** Patience, patience, patience. We don't all have identical devices, connection issues are inevitable, and this is a steep learning curve for us all. Access to technology is another equity issue that presented itself in a harsh way last spring. Communities are continuing to make strides to equalize this disparity. If you have device or connectivity issues be persistent in communicating those needs with your district or school building.

These insights are in no way exhaustive. They are the key points that we personally as teachers and parents have experienced as contributing to a positive distance learning environment. No one wants this situation; it is difficult for everyone, especially parents. Teachers want to safely be in the classrooms with their students. We know that in person learning is far superior to remote learning. We also want our students, staff, and families to remain healthy. This is a temporary situation and we all need to show grace as we support each other through it.