In Remembrance of Lorey A. Zaman

Our Friend, Our Sister, Our Leader.

Our association suffered an immeasurable loss with the sudden passing of State President Lorey A. Zaman in early September. Since Lorey’s passing, PTA members have supported each other while seeking a way to celebrate Lorey’s life and lasting legacy.

NYS PTA has established the Memorial Fund in Honor of Lorey A. Zaman to recognize her long service working on behalf of children, families and educators and her lasting legacy with NYS PTA.

You can contribute HERE to the Memorial Fund in Honor of Lorey A. Zaman.
The NYS PTA Board of Directors will be meeting again in November to discuss our continued memorialization of our dear friend.

Lorey's presidential theme--Garner the Past, Change Today and Embrace Tomorrow calls for all to join in crossing the bridge to a future of focusing on kids, keeping a positive, forward-thinking mindset, being bold and brave and leading with passion. In her message at the state convention last fall, Lorey concluded, “Leadership is not about being the best leader; leadership is about making everyone else better, and Courage doesn’t mean you don’t get afraid; Courage means you don’t let fear stop you. Thank you for all you do – I will see you on the other side!”

Current NYS PTA President Jane E Harsha shares, “Lorey had an infectious enthusiasm and inspiring commitment to the work of PTA. More importantly, she never let the demands of leading a large organization dim her bright vision of its core purpose–to protect and nurture all children, everywhere.”

“On behalf of the NYS PTA Governance Team and staff, we truly mourn Lorey, and give our deepest sympathies to her family,” offered Kyle Belokopitsky, NYS PTA Executive Director. "She gave her heart and soul to this association for more than two decades. She was an innovative thinker, a passionate advocate, and believed that it was her mission – our mission – to support every child with one voice. We promise to carry on her legacy, and to live like she did – with integrity, honesty, passion, love, dedication, and commitment to our PTA values. We miss you dear friend each and every day.”

We share with you some thoughts on our dear friend. You can read more HERE.
A Message from the President

JANE HARSHA, PRESIDENT

Who doesn’t love the fall? The cool, crisp air, the mellow sunshine, the ruddy cheeks of apples and little children, and for me--stone walls. Living in a rural area, I look out the window and see walls that are decades, even centuries old. Every year, after months of hiding behind summer foliage, they emerge from a shower of colored leaves to stand out in their flinty splendor—sturdy witnesses to the fact that past generations survived the hardships and disasters of their times and we too will rebound from the troubles of ours.

These structures bring to mind the Robert Frost poem “Mending Wall.” The poem describes how two neighbors come together each year to inspect and repair the stone wall that forms the boundary between their farm properties. While one neighbor claims that “good fences make good neighbors,” the other can’t escape the irony that the only thing that unites them even one day a year is to strengthen the wall that keeps them apart the other 364. “Before I built a wall,” he reflects, “I’d ask to know what I was walling in or walling out.” It’s a question we should ask ourselves today.

For the past seven months we’ve been literally living behind walls, shutting out the threat of infection by neighbors, closing in our loved ones to try to keep them safe. Sometimes this has meant quarantining to the point of total isolation. Even when we’re together, face masks obscure our normal expressions and signs of affection. Though necessary, hunkering down and distancing from others come at a human cost. They force us to set aside familiar ways and reassess concepts like caring and community: to pause and ask what and whom we are walling in and walling out. But any challenge can be an opportunity for PTA.
A Message from the President
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As volunteers that work closely with students and families, PTA members have been disoriented by the pandemic’s impact on school and home life. How do we do PTA, we may ask, if we can’t even meet on school grounds, much less hold favorite events like arts assemblies, family STEM and storytelling, or welcome back meet ‘n’ greets? For a membership-based family engagement and advocacy organization, it’s crisis time.

As in any crisis, the key for PTA in COVID times is to go back to basics—our central purpose and our defining mission: to make every child’s potential a reality and to be a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for the education and well-being of every child. Engaging and supporting families, empowering advocates, fighting for all children’s well-being and equitable access to a quality education: this is who we are.

You don’t need to shake a legislator’s hand to advocate for fair school funding. You don’t need to welcome parents in person to ask how they’re doing and what they need. You don’t need to hold a banquet to have a guest speaker. These aims can be pursued via calls, virtual meetings, online surveys or chats. Open those virtual meetings to the community, and make your PTA the ally and friend that knows who can provide answers and resolve concerns and reaches out to families to share that information.

What PTA needs to do in any time is create community: to ask who’s left out and then break down the walls of language, race, party, and zip code to unite with them and speak up for every child and family.

Register Today for NYS PTA Conference 2020!
Introducing Our Unconventional Event! Join us Virtually for the NYS PTA Conference 2020 and Much More!

BY BONNIE RUSSELL, CONFERENCE COORDINATOR AND RENEE DANIELS, CONFERENCE COORDINATOR IN TRAINING

NYS PTA is excited to announce that NYS PTA Conference 2020 will be held virtually this year on November 13-15, 2020. Our conference will represent the business of the association and will include discussion and voting on bylaws amendments and resolutions, along with electing and voting on new state officers. We will also be offering exciting workshops, keynote speakers, virtual exhibitors, and much more, in between the General Sessions of our Annual Meeting.

Looking to increase membership and participation in your PTA? Need programs and fundraising ideas? Want to sharpen your skills and learn something new to take back to your PTA?

We have it all in one inspirational weekend that will ignite the flame of the torch PTA advocates proudly carry on behalf of our children.

Embrace Today, Shape Tomorrow at the NYS PTA Conference, November 13-15, 2020!
Exciting News!
Conference Registration Extended to Nov 9!

Because of high interest, we are keeping registration open until November 9! We don't want anyone to miss out on this unique opportunity to connect with thought leaders like the CDC, Mental Health Association of NYS, NYS School Counselors Association, our own PTA experts and more!

For only $50 you can attend all three days of Conference, plus have access to high quality training opportunities to enhance your skills and help run your PTA.

To learn more or to register please visit https://nyspta.org/home/events/convention/
Navigating the Remote-Learning Adventure...

AMY HYSICK, EDUCATION COORDINATOR

These words are frequent visitors in conversations around many dinner tables, with the beginning of school upon us. However, there may be misconceptions about the definition of some of these, which can hinder the productivity of these conversations. Allow me to offer my perspective, as a mother of a new 5th grader and a teacher in a public high school.

Hybrid: a combination of in-person instruction and learning activities provided by the school/teacher for students to complete on the computer at home. Students will physically go to the school building some days and stay home on other days.

Remote: students will complete all learning activities and assignments online and will not be physically in the school building. Learning experiences are designed and provided by teachers. (Also called Distance Learning.)

Synchronous: think ‘live’ lesson, where a teacher presents material or works with students in real-time, via Zoom or Google Meet. (*There are serious equity issues if these are required for all students, but that’s a whole different conversation.)

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Asynchronous: think ‘on-demand,’ where lessons or materials are provided for students to watch or complete as their schedule allows. A teacher pre-records or selects learning experiences, posts them to an online student learning platform, and students access them when they want or need to.

Homeschooling: exactly how it sounds. Parents are responsible for all aspects of their children’s’ educational experiences. They select, prepare, and deliver curriculum, and the school district is not involved in or responsible for any facet of the learning process. (This is not the same as the crisis learning we started this spring when schools closed.)

At-home schooling: assignments and curriculum are prepared and delivered by teachers employed by the student’s school district. Teachers provide materials, feedback, grades, instruction (delivered either live or on-demand), and support the students who are completing their learning experiences outside the school building.

Right now, some parents want their children in school full time with no restrictions, some think in-person learning is too big a risk no matter what precautions are being taken and are keeping children home for fully remote learning, and others have opinions and feelings that fall somewhere in the middle of these extremes. It is difficult to find one solution that meets the needs of all families, and districts are trying to find a middle ground that balances students’ need for instruction with the concerns of public health. The best thing we can do is to support and encourage our children, help build resilience when situations are difficult, and be gentle with the teachers and administrators who are doing their best to support our students’ learning. There isn’t anyone who is truly happy with any of this, and the only way we’re going to get through it is to be intentional about getting there together.
So, We're Back to School...  

LISSA ZUKOFF, SPECIAL EDUCATION SPECIALIST

Going back to school is always somewhat stressful, and this year promises to be even more so. Whether your family is attending full in-person, hybrid, distance, or home schooling - it’s all going to involve some new challenges.

Right now I am getting so much information, from so many sources, that I’m not sure what to do with it all.

Between the school district, social media, the news, and various advocacy groups - I’m in information overload! This is all extremely important to know, but I can’t possibly process it all at the same time. So, how can I save the articles and links to easily access at a later date?

I can’t tell you how many times over the past few years, when a situation came up and I knew I had “just” read an article about it - yet I couldn’t find what I was looking for. I eventually got so frustrated with myself that I made it a point to find a resolution to this dilemma. In hindsight it was a fairly simple solution; yet I have found it to be a lifesaver.

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I've discovered that the best way to ensure that I can get my hands on what I need, when I need it, is to make my own resource library. I created a folder on my computer called “Ed Resources”, where I bookmark sites and articles I want to be able to easily access when I need to do research. For those who aren’t familiar with how to do this, here is a link to a Google article: Create, view & edit bookmarks - Computer - Google Chrome Help.

Every child is different, so it is important that parents have access to resources to help them find the right solution for their family. By creating your own library, you can personalize the information as it suits your needs.

Plus, when you are in a rush or need to access the information quickly, you know exactly where to go.

Please email specialeducation@nyspta.org with any suggestions for the Special Education page of nyspta.org.
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*National PTA does not endorse any commercial entity, product, or service. No endorsement is implied.
As the new school year begins, PTA is facing many challenges as we navigate the current climate of school re-openings. The business of PTA remains important and we always need to look to the future of the organization each year.

As a past Region Director and Region Board officer, it has been my experience that the issue of Nominations and Elections was one of the top two issues that units would contact the Region about: Nominating committee not chosen correctly; elections not done properly; not following the current bylaws; officers not communicating with the membership. All these issues can lead to confusion and conflict in your PTA unit.

By conducting the entire process in a proper way, your unit will have the transparency that all units should have and will go a long way to ensuring trust among your unit members. Included here is important information that will help your unit get through this sometimes-contentious process.

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Reminder: Information for ALL things related to Bylaws, Procedures, Nominations, and Elections, please refer to the NYS Resource Guide, Section 7 - Bylaws and Procedures.
Bylaws – All units need to check their bylaws PRIOR to starting this process. Following the bylaws ensures that you will proceed in the correct way. All bylaws state that the ELECTION of the nominating committee must take place AT LEAST 60 days prior to the election meeting. Your bylaws will state how many members you elect from the Board of Directors and how many must be elected from your general membership. If your election meeting will be May 15, then your committee should be elected NO LATER THAN March 16. HOWEVER – there is a good deal of support for electing the committee earlier in the year. At the beginning of the school year, you generally see the largest number of members in attendance, therefore you could have the opportunity to elect the committee then and include both experienced and newer PTA members. This ensures the committee will have adequate opportunity to meet and decide on a slate of officers for the coming year.

National PTA elects members to the Nominating and Leadership Recruitment Committee (NLRC) at their annual convention in June, and their role is a year-long commitment to finding the best possible candidates for elected positions for the Board of Directors and NLRC of National PTA.

The nominating committee MUST publish the proposed slate of officers either two weeks or one month prior to the election. (Bylaws check) So, again, the earlier they are elected, the greater the probability that they will complete their business within the time frame necessary before the election meeting.

Elections – There is a right way and a wrong way to conduct an election meeting. Your bylaws state what month the election meeting shall be held and whether there is a two-day notice requirement for intent to run from the floor for a position. This information MUST be communicated to members when the slate of officers is published. The nominating committee chair will be called upon to read the proposed slate of officers. Prior to the vote, the President will communicate these procedures to all members present and voting. PTA bylaws do not allow for a mail-in vote or vote by phone when there is a live meeting. (At this time, exceptions have been made for meetings and elections due to COVID-19. Information on conducting virtual meetings/elections is available on the NYS PTA website).

Suggested procedures for conducting an election:
- New memberships will be accepted up until (time) on the election meeting date
- Each candidate will be given two minutes to speak prior to the election
- Two tellers will be appointed
- Membership will be validated prior to receiving a ballot
- A member must place their ballot in the ballot box/ballots will be collected by tellers
- Vote for only one candidate and write the first and last name/initial on the ballot
- Fold the ballot in half once before handing to the teller or placing it in the ballot box
- The tellers will leave the room to count the ballots and return the results to the President.

When all members are aware of these procedures, it will save time and questions so that the election can proceed expeditiously.

When the proper procedures for the nominations and elections process is followed, the PTA is allowing for transparency to its’ members and ensuring that a smooth transition will take place for a successful new year.

It also increases opportunities for the committee to see people in action and make it easier when it comes time to review people for offices. It gives committee members the time to form and act as a team.
Important Bylaws Updates

LUCILLE VITALE, VICE PRESIDENT AND DESIGNATED OFFICER - BYLAWS

Question – My Bylaws have expired but we are unable to have a live meeting, what can we do?

Answer - Due to these extenuating circumstances, New York State PTA is allowing units extra time in getting their bylaws renewed. We understand how the challenges of working under the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic have severely impacted our PTAs and their ability to function. However, there are some things that you can do, while waiting to be able to have a live PTA meeting to approve them.

1. Set up a bylaws committee–three to five members is sufficient–the committee and the chair are appointed by the President in consultation with the executive committee.

2. The committee members should receive a copy of your current PTA bylaws for review. The documents for assistance with the bylaws can be found on the NYS PTA website. They can then meet via conference call to discuss any changes that need to be made.

3. If there are no suggested edits, the chairman will go to the bylaws wizard and input the bylaws exactly as they are.

4. Once that is completed, the President can then send out an email to ALL of the members of your PTA along with a copy of these bylaws. The email should include the statement referring to the bylaws along with the following – “Our PTA bylaws are due for renewal. The bylaws committee has reviewed them and have determined that there are NO changes to be made. Therefore, if there is no objection, we will move the bylaws renewal forward at this time. Anyone who has any concerns or objections MUST respond to this email by 5:00 pm on [insert date] (three-five days after the email has been sent is recommended).” If the President has not received any objections then the bylaws can be moved as adopted. If one person objects, then you will have to call a general membership meeting for discussion and approval. Remember, this process would not be acceptable if a live meeting CAN be held!
Important Bylaws Updates

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Question – We need to make a change in our bylaws to raise our dues prior to the start of the new school year, but cannot hold a live meeting, how do we proceed?

Answer -

1. Follow steps 1-3 from the previous question.

2. Because this is a general membership meeting, where you cannot anticipate how many of your members will attend, this can be particularly challenging. The best way to proceed would be to wait until a live meeting can be held.

3. You can have everything ready to go in anticipation of your first meeting in September, with your 30 days' notice given to your members so that you can vote on the bylaws at that first meeting.

4. For specific information on how to conduct a virtual meeting and a vote, please refer to the NYS website COVID-19 page for detailed information.

5. The President will need to call a special virtual meeting of the membership giving at least 10 days' notice of the meeting. You must have a forum which would be accessible to all of your members who wish to participate. All members should receive a copy of the bylaws along with any amendments to be considered. You should allow a period of time prior to the meeting for comments and questions. The comments and questions should come to the president prior to the meeting so that they can be shared with the members prior to the vote. Any changes to the amendments must be prepared in a written motion by a specific date and time in order to better facilitate the meeting. Members will have to register to be a part of the meeting with an email so that you can verify that they are members. The quorum for your association meeting is found in your bylaws, as you must have a quorum in order to vote on your bylaws.

6. A Google form can be prepared ahead of time to be emailed after the discussion, as a "yes" or "no" to approve the amendment, or the motion.

7. As always, it is important to keep detailed minutes of your virtual meeting as proof that you have conducted the meeting and the vote fairly.
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Lessons from the Sidelines

NICOLE PERRETTA, LEATHERSTOCKING REGION DIRECTOR

Before the pandemic struck, my children and I often found ourselves on the sidelines of a game or practice. As our sports schedule begins to ramp back up after the closures, I have begun to reflect on some lessons learned while on the sidelines.

While preparing to go to the field one day, a text pops up from another parent asking me to tell her how practice goes. We check in like that a lot. We ask for clarification of game times or uniform colors. We’ve created a trusted group.

Lesson 1: Lean on your group. They are there to support and guide you throughout your journey.

During a tournament this past weekend, a mom told me she knew my schedule for the upcoming week was tough and to reach out if I needed any help.

When I began to say that I could accomplish it all and didn’t need help – she kindly asked me to stop being stubborn.

Lesson 2: Ask for help, you do not need to do everything yourself.

While driving home from a particularly difficult game, I was talking to my child about the experience. My child began to reflect on all the positive things she and her teammates had done. Even though they lost the game, her takeaway was that her teammates had tried new skills and worked together very well.

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Lesson 3: Focus on the positive and learn from the negative.

Due to all the closures, some of the teams have been mixed and jumbled. The kids are all playing with new friends and coaches. I am often on the sidelines with parents I haven’t met yet. I mentioned to my child that there were many new players and asked her how she felt about it. She excitedly told me about one child’s goalie abilities and another’s striker skills.

Lesson 4: Welcome new people to your group. They bring skills and knowledge to the table that can help in the future.

All of these lessons translate well to the PTA world. We need to trust the group we’re with and lean on them to help us accomplish our goals. Focusing on our successes helps get us through times of turmoil. Welcoming new people? Well, that’s what PTA is all about. Invite everyone to share in our mission to speak for every child with one voice.

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Field Support

JOAN WABNIK, FIELD SUPPORT COORDINATOR

We all need support. Someone to reach out to ask a question, check that the information you are providing to your members is accurate. The Field Support Coordinator (FSC) is that person. This position provides assistance to the 12 regions of NYS PTA and serves as the support system for Region Directors. They respond to communications received from units or councils directed to them by the state office. They will share information after consulting with the Region Director that is pertinent to each region.

Our units and councils must be in good standing which requires paying insurance, up to date bylaws, appropriate number of officers and of course members.

The FSC will monitor and assist Region Directors with units that may not be able to maintain these requirements.

Our monthly calls include the Region Directors and Designated Officer. It is a time to discuss issues that affect our member units and share ideas for possible events or trainings.

As a member of the Board of Directors, coordinators assist at state events. They can be called upon to conduct workshops and work with members providing the most up to date information.

They assist in trainings for Region boards. Our members are an important part of our state PTA and together with our Region Directors we assist all for a successful year.
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Fall: An Important Time for PTA

PATRICE RACHLIN, RESOLUTIONS COORDINATOR

“Awakening of the civilized world to the needs, the possibilities of the child, and pointing the way to his (her) harmonious development.” Mother’s Magazine, Vol. 1, No.1 (The National PTA’s first magazine, published in 1898).

The approach of Fall brings cooler temperatures, falling leaves, and the perfect time for civic duty and advocacy.

Fall is an important time ... today, and back in 1898, PTA advocacy encompasses all activities that serve to preserve and improve public education as well as ensure the “care and protection of children and youth” at home, in the school, and in the community.

This November there will be a presidential election, and as PTA members, it is our duty to “get the vote out” while being non-partisan. Check the NYS PTA Resource Guide - Advocacy Section and National PTA Election Guidelines for information on what a PTA unit is able to facilitate while encouraging the community to vote.

Additionally, NYS PTA will host their Annual Business Meeting this November.

This event allows members to weigh-in on topics, obtain training, elect state officers, and participate in the governance of NYS PTA by voting on Resolutions.

Don’t forget to attend the caucus at the Annual Business Meeting where you will get the scoop on the two NEW proposed resolutions!

Additional Resources:
- Annual Business Meeting Information
- NYS PTA Resource Guide: Bylaws Section, Advocacy Section
- National PTA Advocacy Page:
- National PTA Advocacy Toolkit
- National PTA Advocacy Resources
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The ABCs of Maintaining Your Child’s Health this School Year

AMANY MESSIEHA DGHEIM, MD, WELLNESS COORDINATOR

While families are embracing different educational environments, whether their children’s schools have fully reopened or are temporarily providing virtual or hybrid instruction, maintaining everyone’s health and wellbeing remains on the forefront of all our minds.

In addition to federal, state and local guidance provided to school districts and childcare facilities reopening through a lingering COVID-19 pandemic, parents and families continue to have an intricate role in curbing the spread of the virus as well as other communicable diseases. While the task may seem overwhelming, it appears to boil down, mostly, to the basics of good hygiene and sound decision making.

Public health experts emphasize the importance of proper hand washing to protect children and adults alike from the transmission of Corona Virus, colds and flus.

Proper hand washing requires wetting the hands with safe running water, applying enough soap to cover wet hands, scrubbing all surfaces of hands – including backs of hands, between fingers and under nails – for at least 20 seconds (whether you sing with your child the ABCs, birthday song or your own creative melody, thoroughly rinsing with running water and drying hands with a clean, dry cloth, single-use towel or hand drier as available.

Washing hands often, especially before and after eating; after nose blowing, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom and whenever hands are visibly dirty, is the first line of defense against airborne infections that tend to be most common in the first few months of the school year in the fall/early winter months. If soap and water are not readily available, using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol can help reduce the transmission of droplet infections as well.

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The ABCs of Maintaining Your Child’s Health this School Year

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Covering the mouth and nose with a mask when in public areas, covering a sneeze or cough with elbow or tissue, avoiding touching face, avoiding sharing towels and personal items, maintaining a clean home as well as regularly disinfecting spaces, especially lavatories and surfaces used to prepare or serve food, are among those basic steps.

While no foods or dietary supplements can prevent or cure COVID-19 infection, healthy diets are important for supporting the immune system which fights infections. Therefore what we eat and drink can affect our body’s ability to prevent, fight and recover from infections.

Additionally, since many of us have been staying at home for extended periods of time, including prolonged sitting, it has become more challenging to keep children physically active, especially when school and recreational sports have been cancelled.

Taking short breaks and doing 3-4 minutes of light physical movement such as walking or stretching can help improve blood circulation to the brain and muscles. Regular physical activity benefits both the body and mind and generally improves our health and stamina. Encourage children to engage in regular physical activities enjoying outdoor activities whenever possible.

Children are most likely to mimic behaviors of the adults at home. Therefore equally important to teaching hand washing, sound hygiene and healthy habits is practicing and modeling the same.

Monitoring your child’s health as well as the health of other members of the family helps identify infections at their early stages and reduces the risk to other members of the same household, at school and additional contacts. Symptoms of COVID-19 such as cough or fever can be similar to those of the flu, or the “common cold”, which are a lot more common. If your child is exhibiting fever, a runny nose, sore throat, earache, rash, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or generalized fatigue, it is best to keep him/her home from school and minimize contact with others. Be sure to notify the school of the absence and symptoms and to timely seek medical advice by contacting your child’s healthcare provider.

Given the major changes children have experienced in past months in their “normal” routines as well as social and educational environments, it is of paramount importance, to pay attention to their social and emotional wellbeing. Establish regular communication, be patient, understand and address their fear and anxiety. Encourage your child to ask questions and express his/her feelings with you and their teachers.

Remember that your child may have different reactions to stress from those of adults that may include difficulty sleeping, bedwetting, stomach pain, or being anxious, withdrawn, angry, clingy or afraid to be alone. Responding to children’s reactions in a supportive manner and explaining that they are normal reactions to an abnormal situation can provide them much needed reassurance.

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Take time to explain, listen, comfort, show affection, reassure and praise as frequently as possible. Create safe opportunities for children to play and relax. Keep regular routines and schedules as much as possible, especially before going to sleep, including creating new routines in new environments. Provide age-appropriate facts about ongoing events while providing them with the examples of what they can do to protect themselves and others. Prevent stigma by using facts and reminding your child to be considerate of others who may be ill or have an ill family member.

Coordinate with your child’s school to receive information and ask how you can support school health and safety efforts though your PTA. Your efforts at home will have the largest impact on the wellbeing of your immediate family at home, school and community.

Remember we’re all in this TOGETHER!
Welcome back to the new school year. If you haven’t heard this yet today – you’re doing a great job.

This certainly has been a challenging time, particularly for students, teachers and families involved in special education. I know this firsthand, as my middle son, Alex, is a 16-year-old with Down syndrome. Back in March, his already small community of friends and variety of social activities became even smaller. It is a relief to get back to a routine with the start of school. Thank you for your work to make this possible for parents like me and students like Alex.

I’m reaching out today not only as a thankful parent but as the president & CEO of Special Olympics New York. We have an impactful opportunity that I hope you will share with your special education teachers, students and families – the Special Olympics New York Fall Sports Season at Home.

When New York went on pause earlier this year, more than 68,000 Special Olympics New York athletes were left without their regular programs in the 22 different sports we offer year-round. More than just sports, these programs provide the physical, mental and social interactions critical to quality of life for people – especially children – with a disability.

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We moved quickly to create a dynamic fitness program to engage our athletes at home and connect our community across the state virtually.

We are continuing the At Home program this fall and would welcome the students you serve. The activities we have designed can be easily adapted for a gym class, either virtually or in a school setting. We are happy to make our resources available to your community for its own adaptation with students.

We stand ready to support your students and classrooms. We are, after all, in this together.

Additional information about the Special Olympics New York Fall Sports Season At Home can be found online at: https://www.specialolympics-ny.org/competition/at-home/.

If you have any questions or would like to learn more, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at shengsterman@nyso.org. Thank you again for your hard work and dedication to our shared community.
From EF Tours

KATE BERSETH, PRESIDENT OF EF EDUCATIONAL TOURS

It is hard to believe that it has been over 6 months since schools suddenly went remote in most of the country and international travel came to a halt. And while much of the world has started to reopen, life is still not fully back to normal. As everyone embarks on this new school year – reacting to constantly updated guidance from your state, district and school leadership, as well as your family’s own personal needs and priorities and trying to find the best option – we have heard one consistent theme: we all need something to look forward to.

Communities sacrificed so much these last few months, socially, financially and professionally – from rites of passage for our students like proms, sports, plays and graduation, to our own human need to interact – with friends, family, colleagues and strangers. As a parent, I can say with a full heart that I desperately want to give my kids something they can look forward to – in fact, I need it just as much as they do.

As I read the headlines locally and around the country daily, one thing continues to resonate for me – the need to truly understand each other and to expand our own perspectives. We live in a global economy and are preparing students with that mindset to help them build successful careers – to understand themselves, the world and their place in the world. And that is more valuable and more important now than ever before.

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Since March, I’ve stayed in constant touch with colleagues and EF teams around the world. I’m feeling cautiously optimistic about travel happening in 2021 and I am very confident in 2022. However, there is still uncertainty and many questions I’m sure you all have about safety that will impact your community’s decision about travel as well as your personal decision for your child. I want you to know that we are here to support you through the decision-making process and to answer those questions and help you make informed decisions. I’m proud of the hundreds of EF operations staff located in our offices around the world, as well as our staff here in New York, Boston, and across the U.S., who have been working diligently to understand and adjust to what future travel will look like; helping us all prepare to get back to exploring the world together.

We are committed to providing travel that focuses on safety, but also on the integrity and quality of the tour experience. We are monitoring several factors to understand when tours will be able to move forward again. This includes taking account of the many governmental travel and public health orders and advisories both at home and abroad that would affect your child’s travel on the tour program or their return home. It means understanding whether those orders or restrictions will affect our ability to secure key suppliers and activities for the tour - such as coach buses, hotels, restaurants, museum entrances - or, even more importantly, whether local conditions will allow for them to provide the safe and high quality experience of the standard and integrity that compelled you to initially enroll your child in this experience. And once travel can resume, we are also making sure it should resume for our travelers by monitoring the U.S. State Department’s Travel Advisories and the guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on a country-by-country basis. So once travel resumes and you decide you’re ready - I can promise we will be here for you, with the safety of our travelers continuing to be our first priority, as it has been for the last 55 years.
With over five decades in the educational travel industry, EF has seen the best and the worst the world has to offer. And in my 15+ years at EF (and 20+ as a parent), I’ve seen what an educational travel experience like this can do for a child - they return home with expanded knowledge of the world around them, a deeper understanding of new people, places and cultures and - something that I believe most all parents want for their child - more confidence and more independence.

Well over 80% of groups that were scheduled to travel in 2020 have rescheduled for a future tour. And we intend to be here so that when travel resumes and we can do so safely, those students and groups - as well as the tens of thousands of others with the same dream - can take advantage of the transformative experience of travel with EF. We are committed to continuing our mission of giving confidence and freedom to people of all ages, nationalities and backgrounds through travel.

This is my commitment to you: all of EF is here to support you and your communities as we return to dreaming about all the places we’ll go together and giving students something to look forward to again. Should you want to talk about travel options for your child, I encourage you to reach out to teachers in your school to begin planning for a future tour. Because we all need something to look forward to.

From EF Tours

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