

Parents,

Kids are returning to school this fall, masks and all. If you're like me, I have a bunch of mixed emotions, as I'm sure you have as well. I wanted to provide some insight and reassurance about returning to school. And, to encourage some grace for ourselves and others.

It will feel strange this fall as we attempt to slip back into normalcy of returning to school as summer wanes. Do we take first-day-of-school pictures with masks? How do we reassure our kids? To whom do we ask questions when they come up? Last year, we missed the excited anticipation of heading to school. *And* this year, kids are returning in masks to anxious schools and overwhelmed teachers welcoming children as best they can. But, let's be clear, five year-olds starting kindergarten on google classrooms is not what we hope to see. So, going back in any capacity is welcome.

That said, I want to provide all of you a few straightforward reminders as we all head back to school, in any capacity.

Most importantly – **we are all doing the best we can. Teachers, parents and students.**

Teachers did not sign up for teaching during a pandemic. Whether they're in person or online, each one is figuring out how to do this for the first time. If a teacher is in-person, they are worried about their health, *your* kids' health and their own family's health. And if they are online, they are faced with trying to teach distracted, overwhelmed kids in meaningful ways. Please give our teachers grace and understanding. Several teachers have expressed exasperation in tears saying that this way of teaching feels like being a first year teacher all over again and they're trying to figure everything out that's new. ***Thank a teacher.***

Parents did not sign up for this either. Parents are working, we are homeschooling, and we are worried about exposure. We're trying to be medical educators for our kids, social directors for lonely, isolated kids and athletic trainers for kids with no sports. *Parents – be kind to each other.* If your friends are choosing a different path – be encouraging vs. discouraging or judgmental. Reach out to another mom or dad and see if she/he's ok. ***Just be there for each other.***

Children look to us as to whether or not they are ok. And by this, I'm not saying you have to have your stuff together all the time. I get it - none of us are totally "ok" right now and there is a great deal of uncertainty. But, please understand that if we model to kids that things are uncertain, but that we're doing our best in uncertainty, they will observe our ability to face adversity. If teachers embrace whatever circumstance they are in with positivity and guidance, children will pick up on their efforts. If parents model encouragement and support for school and teachers, children will know to trust educators. If we all acknowledge for our kids that this is "absolutely crazy and not what we expected but we're going to make the best of it," they WILL BE OK. We can show them how to face hard stuff and work through it. Facing adversity as a challenge versus a hardship builds resilience.

That's what I mean when I say "kids will be ok if we're ok." What I mean is that kids will be ok if we model that, despite these uncertain times, we're making the best of it.

Just the other day, I talked with a teacher about social distancing and mask wearing *and all the things*. She said that in her classroom, they are decorating masks and using lily pads to hop about the classroom for breaks. "If we're 'two lily pads apart,' we're safe." And you know what? The kids hopped all over the room with their decorated masks – they did it and showed incredible resilience because the adults in their lives showed them how.

So, be kind to each other. Show grace. Know that we are all doing our best as the world begins to open. Just one day, one week, one momentous occasion, one event at a time.

With kindness and compassion,