Thank you, Weehawken Township School District Parents, Grandparents and Guardians

Your Hard Work is Helping to Make the Weehawken School District’s Distance Learning a Success

As my wife and I assisted our four children with virtual class-work this past week, we remarked that, even though we are both educators, helping our children with their distance-learning has at times been difficult and stressful. But if it's this challenging for us, we wondered, what is it like for those who are not professional educators, but have suddenly had to shoulder this important responsibility?.

The responsibility of helping to educate one’s children has always been challenging. But it’s even more so while staying at home under the stress of the coronavirus pandemic; other work and household responsibilities; and for some of you, taking care of babies, toddlers, or aging parents at the same time. Yet, if our first three weeks have proven anything, it’s what I already knew; that the Weehawken Township community is absolutely committed to education.

In home after home, parents, grandparents, guardians, and even older sisters and brothers are helping young children with their long-distance learning. Though as parents and caregivers, you have been helping your children with their education one way or another their whole lives, never before have you had to take such an active role with schooling.

Ben Cortez, an IT manager, is working from home, as is his wife, Jazmine Cortez, a relationship manager at a bank. Both are juggling work and helping their three daughters; all Daniel Webster students, with their distance learning. They are accustomed to helping their children with homework, Mr. Cortez said, but this is the first time they are helping their daughters with classwork, “We are really teaching,” he said. “We are not doing it as well as the teachers do, but still.” He added, “The amount of preparation involved makes you see first-hand what these teachers do; and they still stay sane!”

When their youngest daughter, Ella, 4, takes her pre-K class online, either Mr. Cortez, or his wife, Jazmine Cortez, stay in the background to make sure she stays connected; to print out assignments; watch and listen to Mrs. Epstein-Barile reading a story to the class; and making sure Ella’s answers get sent to her teacher. Then they read and implement the lesson plans posted by Ella’s teacher.
The Cortez’s children appreciate the help. Second-grader Olivia Cortez, 7 (left), said, “I am thankful and grateful my parents can stay home and help me, and didn’t lose their jobs.” (Yes, she really said that.)

Her sister, Emily, also 7 (right), said she liked having her parents around to help her with her school work. “It’s really fun,” she said. “We get to be at school, but not really, because they are our parents, too.”

In addition, Daniel Webster launched a set-up whereby multiple classmates can “meet” together with their teacher, virtually. For Ella (above), at least one of their parents has been present for that, too, even while meeting his or her professional responsibilities.

Rachel Guberman, a human resources consultant whose children are in the fifth and sixth grades at Theodore Roosevelt School, is, along with her husband, working remotely from home full-time. Despite
the “Do Not Disturb” sign on her home-office door, Ms. Guberman opens her door every hour to check on how her children are doing with their school work, and steps in to help.

“I am so impressed by how hard the teachers are working to provide creative, super-interesting multimedia challenges to the kids: Their videos, assignments and check-ins are really powerful,” Ms. Guberman said. “But what is lost in distance learning is the attention to learning style that these teachers normally offer, and how they answer individual questions instantly.” Now it’s up to the adults at home. “The parents are boots on the ground. In the classroom, kids have a million questions,” Ms. Guberman said. “And now those questions are coming to us.”

Parents and guardians now have to figure out how their children best learn, Ms. Guberman said. “Not all children can learn by watching a video: Some have to be guided through the problem over and over again. We are not only teaching our kids, we are teaching them based on their learning style.”

With as many as six different classes a day for each of her children, it’s a challenge to work full-time and still help answer all their questions, which can run the gamut from explaining the directions of an assignment, to helping with the assignment itself. “I tell them, ‘Let’s read them together,’” Ms. Guberman said. “Other times I am standing in front of a whiteboard in my home office. I’m working really hard not to give them the answers.”

Judging by the amount and quality of work being submitted to our teachers, Weehawken School District students continue their commitment to excellence. They are submitting stellar work, and treating school just as seriously from home as they do when they are in their classrooms. And that is to your credit.

I am so grateful for how you have risen to the occasion of collaborating with your teachers to optimize the long-distance learning experience for your children. As the African saying goes. “If you want to go fast, go alone: If you want to go far, go together.”

That’s what the Weehawken Township School District teachers, administrators, parents and guardians have been doing all along: Going far together.

Your Partner in Education,

Eric Crespo