

SIC Letter to the Community 2020-2021 School Year

There has never been a school year quite like this one! In March of last year, we learned we would make the historic move of closing schools for “a couple of weeks” in reaction to a global pandemic. Those “couple of weeks” turned into the rest of the school year, and there was speculation that we would not return to face-to-face learning this school year. However, with significant safety protocols in place (and about one-third of our families electing to participate in virtual learning) we did so, and we did so with great result. Not only were children and faculty safe, our teachers led our children to significant academic gains.

As we entered this school year, we did so without our usual data from statewide testing. Thus, we continued to use the results of our 2019 SC Ready assessments as our guide, showing a continued need for focus on literacy and math. These data were reinforced by our new formative assessment, iReady. We are proud to report that DMES children have been amongst those achieving the highest growth in our district. As of January, 64 percent of our children had achieved their annual typical growth in iReady Reading, and 56 percent had done so in iReady Math. DMES had our district’s highest percentage of students advance out of Tier 3 (the lowest tier) in iReady math.

In addition to moving ahead academically, DMES utilized technology to stay in touch with our community. For instance, this year’s DMES SIC project was in support of Earn Your Spots, a project in which students are recognized for mastering math facts and sight words. In an effort to make a connection with our families, SIC created Earn Your Spots Quizlets for at home practice, and these are now linked to our school SIC webpage. This helps our families connect with academic expectations and where their children are in relation to those expectations. Additionally, we conducted a virtual schoolwide literacy night during which our families connected to literacy games, reading and internet sites. Our Title I, SIC and PTO meetings were held via Teams, and all of our PTO fundraisers were “no touch.” Remotely, our PTO completed the significant task of becoming a 501c3, and we celebrated both Veterans Day and Black History Month with truly excellent virtual programs.

In a school year where everyone would have been forgiven for expecting the worst, the DMES community brought their best. Certainly, the academic gains are impressive, but what will most be remembered is the bravery, resilience and creativity our community displayed. Whether face to face or virtual, faculty and families wholly retooled classrooms and methods to reflect our new reality. Despite fear and adversity, teachers welcomed back our students with enthusiasm and taught them tirelessly. Faculty and staff covered for colleagues when they were out sick and when they were getting vaccinations. Teachers ate lunches with kids in their classrooms (delivered by a dining hall crew that also reworked their procedures!), and all – students, faculty, staff and parents - kept smiles on their faces though we've foregone some of the fun stuff that helps keep us going through a normal school year. And they did all that with masks on.

There has never been a school year quite like this one, it is true, but Dalmatian Nation proved itself to be more than up for the challenge.