Reclaiming this School Year, Fulfilling our Promises

Covid-19 looms larger than life and has dictated how you, and how we at ACEF, have conducted our work for the last several weeks in the United States and for several months worldwide. No more. We are reclaiming this school year for the work God has called us to in Christian education and we are reclaiming this school year on behalf of the families and students we collectively serve.

There has been full year closures of public-school systems, exclusion of grades and testing for the year and more news of similar steps being taken in other states today. This is a call to deviate from the accepted guidance, to be more and to carry forward the name “Christian” that we proudly own as we serve our communities.

As a movement, we are calling on schools to shift the conversation from a mentality of “school closure” to “finishing this year strong.” We owe this to our families, to our staffs and to the mission we have been called to. Shifting from a mindset of “whether we should” to “how do we get there.” This will not be a waisted or half measure school year.

To that end we are calling Christian schools to continue with their programs, to not forgo testing, grades or the high educational standards you went into the school year with.

Why we believe this is the right course of action:

1. **The God we serve is bigger than our circumstances and we answer to Him ultimately**
   - “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” (2 Timothy 1:7). Times are difficult, but we can weather this storm with the supernatural guidance of the Spirit of God.
   - “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19). We are simply asking, that as a movement, we do what we can through the tools and resources God puts at our service. We do not believe we are asking too much. With God all things are possible. (Philippians 4:13).
   - Let us continue to serve and show a different, better path for our communities that does not leave students behind.

2. **Fulfilling our obligations**
   - We do not operate under the same premise as the public-school system. Christian schooling is structured around a set of contractual obligations made to families and that families in turn make to schools. The more services and aspects of a student’s education that is dropped, the closer a
school comes to not fulfilling its promises to a family. To name just a few of these aspects that can come into play: testing, grades and appropriate student progression and development.

- Ultimately parents are contracting with the school to deliver an appropriate grade level education. We can still deliver that! Teachers and technology can bridge gaps and we should preserve as many of the indicators showing such an education was provided that we can, such as student assessment within the class and benchmark instruments we have always used.

3. **It is too early to write the year off yet**
   - Early reports from Christian schools in Hong Kong, Korea and Beijing indicate that they are now preparing to return to school sooner rather than later. Life is slowly returning to normal and they foresee returning to school this year yet. Government action will ultimately determine whether that happens or not, but there is light at the end of the tunnel.
   - The Americas are too early into this crisis to determine what will happen by this summer.

4. **What we decided to do this year will impact students for years to come**
   - At the end of this unusual time, schools and families will want to know where their students are academically. Standardized testing and classroom assessment can help schools know what was accomplished, what students are lacking, and will help educators focus their efforts on what students need to be successful at the next grade. We care about kids and where they actually are but need to identify if they have those requisite skills that are needed for the next school year and where a student needs additional support.
   - Some students will excel in the classroom, other students will excel in home-based learning and some students will excel or struggle regardless of the delivery model. The mode of delivery should not be a reason for holding a child’s potential back a year.
   - Standardized testing will be the same across the country. This is not a regional phenomenon that would put kids in an unfavorable light compared to others. It will be an accurate comparison because everyone is more or less in the same situation.

5. **Re-envisioning how we do school**
   - We are on a path that ends with some, if not all, states waiving mandatory state attendance standards of seat hours or days of instruction. If, or rather when, that happens, Christian schools will have more flexibility than ever to use this school year to create the educational system they have wanted but could not implement. In other words, the focus can be placed on learning and not on the clock. Why would we waste such an opportunity?

We are calling Christian schools to not forgo the school year, to not cancel assessments, to not look at this from a standpoint of how we simply get through this year. We realize many are at the point of just making it to tomorrow. However, we want to encourage you as you take one step in front of the other that daylight is ahead and when we reach it, let’s keep in mind where we want to finish. We will finish this race!

“Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress.” (Philippians 4:14) Paul writes to the Philippian church thanking them for being a faithful support when he was in need during his mission work. Likewise, we seek to faithfully support you during this time of need. We are actively seeking ways we can do this. You have received several emails from us and will continue to receive regular communications from us providing connection and resources through this time of uncertainty.
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