Dear SPARK Families,

How are you? How is your family holding up? I really miss seeing so many of you and connecting in person, both professionally and personally (at Sun ‘N Fun/Club STAR, at school morning drop off, on the sports field, at City special events, and just around town). One lesson I have taken from the COVID pandemic is the value of connection more than ever and I’d love to hear from you, feel free to send me an email update or give me a phone call.

On our end, we have seen a bit of the 7th week of school doldrums, both in our home and in our SPARK program. The other day I asked my son what costume he wanted to make for Halloween this year (Burger family tradition, we do celebrate Halloween and we always make our costumes, mostly at the last minute, always in a frenzy) and he said, "What’s the point, we won’t be doing anything anyway." Ack! This broke my heart, because he is right – we won’t be doing anything and yet we, as parents and family members, are still trying to find ways to keep the joys of childhood alive.

At SPARK, our staff team is trying to keep that joy alive as well, because we truly and honestly love being your child care partners. There’s a mixture of emotions among the kids (again in SPARK and in my own family): a bit of boredom, a bit of acceptance, a bit of frustration, some acting out, some checking out, and still a real, honest to goodness sense of grit, perseverance and resilience. I know I’ve said it before, but I have to say it again – our children are amazing. They blow me away with their ability to transition into such a different reality, continue to laugh and smile and be excited to play – I see how hard the kids are working at SPARK and I want you to be proud of their hard work!

Our team wants to share some suggestions for enhancing your child’s day at SPARK. We also have some programmatic updates, safety reminders and requests and a few other tidbits of information below. As always, I invite you to connect with me directly for any follow up conversation.

How can you, our Family Partners, help set up your child for a great day and week:

- Remember to prepare them for the day: send a water bottle, filling lunch and appropriate clothing for this wacky weather;
- Provide a list of what your child should be doing, including meeting times, for the SPARK child care partners;
- Ask your teacher what supplies your child needs for the week and send it with your children;
- We prefer you not to bring your Chromebook from home and the District has purchased extras so each child has one at site and at home. If you are transporting them, they need to come fully charged and will be cleaned upon entry;
Distance Learning Challenges for Child Care Partners and Solutions:

Is it Legit?

Our team has shared confusion about what is legit school work and what is not. And, as a parent helping navigate the same with my children, I think it is valid confusion. Often our children are asked to watch YouTube for their learning: commercials, cartoons, videos, even Mind Craft lessons – these are legitimate assigned learning activities. So it is hard for our staff to clarify if your child is on the right “YouTube” page. If something doesn’t seem right, we will commit to asking the child, asking them to show us the link to the activity. If the child is in fact perusing YouTube (or another website) that is not connected to their school assignments, we will ask them to return to assignment. If they choose not to comply, we will ask them to turn off device and communicate with you at the end of the day. We will only ask you to pick them up if they continue not to comply and continue to knowingly make inappropriate choices on devices. That said, we cannot guarantee that your child is always on the right page and is not using the internet for personal reasons. We do our best, but as we have shared, cannot have our 2 eyes on all 14 children at the same time.

Is it Complete? Suggestions for Family Partners

Please recognize we can’t tell if an assignment is complete. As our family partner, we continue to ask you to communicate with the school partners for progress on your child’s work. And, ask how to check their work, if you don’t already know. (I was given a great tutorial by my son’s teacher once learning that he didn’t complete a reading log for an entire week.) This is another reason to keep your Chromebook at home so you can review assignments with your child, although you can also access through Google Classrooms.

Child Care Partners and School Partners: What Does the Future Hold?

We have all seen the news, schools may start to reopen as the County has been in the red zone for two weeks. That said, I do not have (nor do I expect) and word from the District that school will open for in-person instruction before January for all children. The information we have all received from the District communications shares that small group in-person instruction is being tiered in for different learner groups, but no other information has been provided.

That said, what will happen in January!? Again, we don’t know any more than you do at this point. We continue to seek input from the school district and Public Health regarding expected levels of school so we can plan child care appropriately. I wish I could give you a concrete idea, but I don’t believe we will know anything until mid-November, giving our team a few weeks to create and implement a plan for January. Please be patient and know we are doing everything we can to continue providing the essential childcare we have been providing since June, and will continue to pivot as requirements and realities change.
Community Partnership: How can you prevent COVID Spread?

We are so proud that our programs have had zero transmission cases since June 15 because of the practices in place: Cohort Groups, Safety Monitors and Family Check In Stations, Sanitization Policies and Practices, Face Coverings, Distancing, and more. We continue to meet and exceed best practice recommendations per CDC and State Licensing. As things are opening, as flu season is upon us, as Halloween nears, we ask everyone to remain vigilant in protecting your cohort group, your child care partner staff and our community as a whole.

Specific reminders:

- **Cohort Groups:** Please remember that you are making a commitment to the child care staff, children and other families in your cohort. We ask that you don’t commit to multiple cohort groups (other learning groups, sports or structured activities) or participate in unsafe gatherings. Our staff have been asked to uphold the same strategy in remaining safe. Our staff have committed to working with your children, supporting them in person, and we ask that you remain mindful of their health and the health of their families. We had one family reach out and un-enroll as they said their child would be participating in after school activities and they didn’t want to risk the well being of multiple groups. We are so grateful for this type of conscientious decision making and respect this family’s choice for community wellness.

- **Halloween:** It’s coming, it’s a Saturday, it’s my family’s dream (it is honestly one of my favorite times of the year, I make a giant pot of chili, we host a party and trick-or-treat with friends), but this year will be different. I’m not sure how it will look, but we will be assessing all choices we make with the wellness of our community in mind, and honestly will likely be family movie night with chili. If you have any creative suggestions on how to keep some of the fun without breaking social distancing mandates, please let me know! If your family does partake in social gatherings that risk exposure of COVID, please consider taking a break from the program to ensure the well-being of all. We have asked our staff to uphold these same standards.

- **Has someone in your home been potentially exposed (through travel, large gathering, a fluke of a situation)?** Please, if you feel you have been exposed or your family has, take time to stay home and keep the rest of the cohort well. The realities of COVID are debilitating and long-term. If there may be an exposure, and want to discuss it, please know that you will be met with understanding, trusting and non-judgmental ears. We are a community and in this together.
Communication:
If you want to chat, give us a call or send us an email. City phone’s are flip-phones, so please avoid texting as we won’t be able to receive them. 😊

Registration and Program Closure Updates
Registration for Session 4 (November 2-20) begins next Wednesday, October 14. Reminders slips will be at the school site and an email will be sent to the address on file, but we will no longer be calling each family individually. Deadline for priority registration is October 20th.
Our programs will be closed on the following dates – no child care will be provided - please plan ahead!

Program Closure Dates
(Please note, costs for Session 4 will reflect closure dates):

- Teacher Work Day, November 6
- Veteran’s Day, November 11
- Thanksgiving Holiday, November 23-27

Again, we are grateful to provide your family the essential child care you need, we are honored to be with your children each day, and we thank you for being partners as we work for the wellness of our entire community. Here’s to a great October!

Be well,

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