

Dear reader,

Let's make this a summer of play.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization officially declared the COVID-19 virus a global pandemic. Since last March, our lives have been drastically altered. Schools and childcare facilities have closed, re-opened, and closed several times. Formal and informal activities have been disrupted. The only contact between some loved ones has been through a screen. Yet, through all this change, some things stay the same. Children have and will continue to play and learn. We couldn't stop children from learning if we tried.

No matter how much or how little children have attended to formal academics, they have been learning. They have also been experiencing a pandemic alongside their families. Children have both endured and witnessed the stress, fear, disappointment, and grief that navigating the COVID-19 pandemic has imposed on individuals and communities. They have witnessed extraordinary perseverance and community effort to keep people safe. Children have revealed immeasurable resilience, strength, and growth.

Play is learning. Play is healing. Play makes us happy.

On behalf of many professionals who work in the interests of children and education, we implore adults, families, and children to lean into the desire to play in the wake of the collective trauma of COVID-19. Play is essential for the development, learning, health, and happiness of children. Although we could go on about the benefits of play and the learning that happens through play, play's endless developmental and academic benefits are not the point. This life that we are living is short. This past year has confirmed that it is also unpredictable.

We ask that those who read this letter to consider the significance of play for all ages at all times. For those of you who live with, love, and care for children: we ask you to especially consider the importance of play for children at this specific time. We ask you to trust that in the autumn, as always, teachers will welcome each unique child exactly as they are and anticipate a school year ahead full of rich academic learning. For now, though, we ask that you play.

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On behalf of those who sign this letter, many of whom are educators, we assure you that play is worth your time and worth your children's time; this is true always, but in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic it is paramount.

We hope you enjoy a healthy, happy, and play-filled summer of 2021.

Signed, in the interests of children –

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