

Dear Georgia families,

November is Family Engagement Month. Each year in my time as State School Superintendent, I've marked this occasion by writing a letter of thanks to Georgia's parents and families.

All of those letters were sincere and deeply felt. They represented a belief I've held since my time as a teacher – that parents and families are their children's first teachers, and that their involvement helps not just one child but a whole class or school of children.

Yet, while all of those past letters were true and heartfelt, parents and families have never deserved our gratitude more than they do in 2020.

To Georgia's parents, families, and guardians – you have truly stepped up. Since March 2020, you have walked right alongside us as educators. You have been flexible and adopted new skills. You've had the difficult experience of watching your children face disappointment and upheaval, and you've risen to the occasion – for them.

Let me be very clear: I know it hasn't been easy. I know it has been exhausting to juggle distance learning with work and other responsibilities. I know that every day since March has been laden with impossible decisions. Just as, for your students' benefit, we would not have canceled school in the spring if there had been another choice – we would not have asked this of you if there had been another choice. None of us anticipated or asked for this pandemic – yet I have been inspired by the tenacity of your students, and by your dedication to see them succeed, even in these circumstances none of us would have asked for.

We know the statistics, and they are as true as they have ever been. When parents and families are involved – when they are true partners – in their children's education, all students are more likely to succeed academically. Children become more invested in their studies, achievement increases, and schools function better as a whole when everyone is on the same team.

But it's always more personal than that, isn't it? Especially this year. We owe our gratitude not just to parents and families as a whole, but to the parent of a kindergartener helping them adapt to online learning.



To the grandparent talking to their child before in-person instruction begins again, explaining the ways school may be different for a while.

To the foster parent brushing up on their math skills.

To the mom or dad who put together a prom night at home, so their student wouldn't miss that special moment.

To every family member who has extended grace to their child's teacher or principal, knowing – even when it's hard – that this is new for all of us.

Thank you. You have always been your child's first teacher, but this year you have stood alongside us in unprecedented and indispensable ways.

I have never been more confident that, working together – working as a true team – we can ensure a brighter future for every child in our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Woods". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of "Richard" and "Woods" being capitalized and prominent.

Richard Woods
State School Superintendent