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## Parent Feedback from SJA Summer Program and Remote Learning

1 message

**Sarah Henderson** <sarahmhendersonlicsw@gmail.com> Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 2:54 PM To: bcassellius@bostonpublicschools.org, Azayas@bostonpublicschools.org, ataylor@bostonpublicschools.org, mroberts@bostonpublicschools.org, A.E.GEORGE@boston.gov, MICHELLE.WU@boston.gov, JULIA.MEJIA@boston.gov  
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Good afternoon,

I hope this email finds you well. I appreciate the busyness of this moment and what I can only imagine it takes to prepare for the upcoming school year. I believe that my feedback may be useful in considering innovative ways to support remote learning for BPS students. I am the mother of a rising fourth grader at the Lyndon School. She has historically been a slow learner and throughout her school experience has struggled to meet academic milestones at the speed of many of her peers. Throughout the spring, things certainly took a turn for the worst. Many days school started with resistance to join zoom sessions and when she did it was often with video off and a silent mic. She lost confidence and skills. We are fortunate to be a two-parent/two income family who also cohabitate with a grandparent. Even with three adults available, keeping up with our full-time jobs and a grandparent who lacks technical experience to support Zoom, often made it impossible for us to support and supervise to the extent that she needed.

It was this backdrop that motivated me to enroll her in the Excellence for All Schools Without Walls Social Justice Academy offered by BPS this summer. For those included here who may not be familiar with the SJA. I have included a link to the program for your review and reference. I have also cc'd program administration and staff on this email for your convenience.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yd2VQn8QzhIBGQ0cyZq0es8SUFiHWcdBvZhwfxO1qQg/edit>

From the very first contact, I was impressed by the willingness and ability of SJA staff to engage parents and caregivers. They hosted sessions specifically for parents to learn more about the program and ask questions. They were clear in their expectations for parents, which were essentially to get our kids on the calls and they would do the rest. And they did and with incredible patience and perseverance. The teachers, teaching assistants, and teen mentors were able to engage, in our case, mostly 9-year olds, in sophisticated material while also making it fun and engaging. This session's goal was to explore hurricanes through the lens of social justice. The kids worked collaboratively to learn more about Hurricane Maria and the impact that it had on Puerto Rico and the lack of response and resources provided by the U.S. government. Students also learned developmentally appropriate strategies for researching, analyzing, and synchronizing important data to include in a final group presentation. The presentations were educational for students and parents alike.

This experience provided much needed, low key, instruction and academic engagement for my daughter. She attended every class and she was able to navigate getting on her calls with greater confidence and independence. I am hopeful this will allow her to reengage with school (in whatever version) more easily and happily.

The success and hopefully opportunity to replicate is in the design of the SJA which included the following important elements:

Project based social Justice curriculum

Small group instruction

Co taught classes with a teacher and teaching assistant

A teen mentor available for informal group discussions

Grade specific, heterogeneous groups representing students from throughout the district

The latter was especially wonderful as it provided an opportunity to learn alongside peers from different neighborhoods and schools, which we know the current student assignment policy rarely allows for in elementary schools.

I would like to publicly thank the SJA team for a great program. I hope BPS would consider offering similar opportunities throughout the district to help widen opportunities for students at the elementary level to learn skills for examining new and existing curriculum through the lens of social justice and to better understand whose voices and perspectives are amplified and neglected.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarah M. Henderson

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