

March 12, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Today is my last day serving as New York City's Schools Chancellor, and I write to you to both say goodbye and to express my gratitude for each one of you.

During the last three years, I have thought of you not just as colleagues, but as extended family. And this is the toughest, smartest, most dedicated family I have ever had the honor of working with. Your generosity and fortitude have surpassed my expectations.

We have been through unimaginably turbulent times together, and yet have achieved so much for our children. I don't think anyone wants a laundry list, but together we have made so many real changes for the better. Whether it's in academic achievement, or social and emotional learning, or the unprecedented gains for equity in our schools, we have laid an incredible foundation that will support our students for decades to come.

And, of course, together we took on the COVID-19 pandemic, completely reinventing what it meant to teach and learn in New York City's public schools. I cannot tell you how proud I am that we are on track to successfully reopen all our school buildings. Just a few months ago, everyone doubted our ability to do it safely. We have proved them wrong, consistently leading the nation on school reopening.

Every one of you, no matter the role you play, makes a difference in the lives of the City's public school students. Please never forget that helping our school system reach its full potential and lifting up our children is not the job of one person. It is the job of all of us.

There are so many experiences I will take with me, but I'd like to leave you with one that particularly drives home why we do what we do. In 2019, I had the opportunity to meet with students who were multilingual learners as part of a Title 3 summer program. A girl from an elementary school in Brooklyn shared with me that they had read a book about dreams. Their assignment was to write their dreams down on cards and put the cards inside "dream boxes" they created. The idea was: If they write their dreams down, they'll come true.

This little girl's father had been detained in ICE custody in California. Her dream was to be reunited with her father in the land of the free. And she gave me her dream box and said, "You're the Chancellor and I don't want you to forget about me."

This box, which I will keep with me forever, is a reminder that all our students have dreams. It's also a reminder that so many of our families are going through experiences we can't even imagine. And that is why we have worked tirelessly to meet our 1.1 million students where they are, as far as their imaginations take them – and farther still.

While it is hard to leave, I am confident that I am leaving you in excellent, experienced hands. I know that Chancellor Meisha Porter will have your backs while continuing to be a fierce warrior for our students and our schools. In Meisha, you have a Chancellor who has worked in our schools, who has the talent and leadership to finish the school year strong, and who will drive towards bringing every child back to buildings in September.

More than anything, I am proud to have served with you, and so proud of the strides we have made. It has been the honor of a lifetime to serve as your Chancellor. I will miss you deeply and I wish you all well. Hasta pronto...Until we meet again.

In unity,
Richard