

It's Time to Bundle Up!



BUNDLE UP



By Mark Mambretti

One of the best parts of living in New York is having a front-row seat to the full spectrum of Mother Nature's seasons. And with the change of seasons, New Yorkers love the rituals that we follow to mark the passage of time: festivals, fetes and fairs, holidays, big games, and local community events. Recently, it was wonderful to witness firsthand one of these rituals that we sorely missed last year: the return of students — all students — to the classroom. The joy and energy that have been present in the buildings since then have been electric, and the students and staff have been polite, respectful, and responsible. Other than the presence of face masks, it is the closest we've felt to "normal" in 18 months!

But New Yorkers also know that the change of seasons is often marked by storms. And both on the larger and local levels, there have been many storms we have weathered recently. Whether rooted in the pandemic or politics, or in societal, ethical, and even personal concerns, the “storms” of the last 18 months have continually buffeted us and have shown no sign of stopping. And regardless of what side of an issue you may be on, I think we can all agree the storms have led us to be less united than we can be – and should be.

So how can we, as public school administrators, work together to weather these storms?

As Sir Ranulph Fiennes reminds us – and as we all know from living in New York – “There’s no such thing as bad weather, only inadequate clothing.” We, as a district family, must gear up to protect ourselves from the harsh storms!

First, we must take to wearing the gloves of gentleness. Winter drivers know the effects rapid acceleration, quick braking, and sudden turns can have on a vehicle during a storm. The same counts for navigating how to best deal with individuals, families, and situations. Slow, steady, and gentle are the way!

Second, we need to commit to donning the hat of respect, with its two core hallmarks: loyalty and justness. We must pledge – in both word and action – to be a district that both respects and represents the full diversity of the human experience.

Third, it is essential that we put on the glasses of positivity. Instead of focusing on what is wrong with public education, let us focus on what



is strong with public education. That does not mean there aren’t problems – real problems that need real solutions. There are. But it means we must first recognize that there is so much more that is “good” than is “broken.”

Fourth, we have a duty to drape over our shoulders the parka of empathy. There is a line in Disney’s *Frozen* that states, “People make bad choices when they’re mad or scared or stressed...” Over the last 18 months, I believe we’ve all had those feelings – and the longer these storms go on, the more often we’ll all feel them. And as a result, bad choices will happen. The song, however, continues, “...but throw a little love their way and you’ll bring out their best!” Understanding and kindness matter.

Lastly, every day we are required to lace up the work boots of effort. It is not currently easy to do what we do. But when you see the joy and energy the students bring into the building, you see that all the hard work is worth it!

Even if we all dress in this manner, we’re not all going to always agree on what the next step should be. But it does make nonnegotiable the belief that, in a world that seems to have become a politicized “us versus them,” the only way we will survive, and thrive, through the storm is by bundling up to move forward as “we.”

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