

September 13, 2010

Dear Families,

This is the letter I promised you last Wednesday. As I mentioned in my earlier note, my name is Steve Reifman, and I am delighted to welcome you to what I know will be an outstanding year. I consider myself very fortunate to be at such a special place as Roosevelt School. The quality of its staff, the dedication of its volunteers, and the supportiveness of its families and neighboring community are truly precious assets. In this letter I would like to share with you a little bit about who I am and what I hope to accomplish this year.

I am strongly committed to providing your child with the highest quality of education possible. To me, quality education means several things. First, quality education begins with the recognition and appreciation of the fact that each child is unique and special. I believe that all children should be valued for who they are and encouraged to discover their full potential. Each child has something to offer, and each child is a potentially valuable resource to his or her community. I strive to bring out the best in every child. I want all children to take pride in who they are, have a healthy self-esteem, and become independent, self-directed learners.

I place particular emphasis on the importance of character. My top priority is that my students become good people. We will talk about principles such as honesty, kindness, self-discipline, and perseverance. I want to develop students who try their best, never give up, and conduct themselves in a courteous manner. I will try my very best to lead by example.

Second, quality education involves taking each individual student and bringing everyone together to form a cohesive, supportive team. Just as I try to develop a sense of identity and self-esteem in each child, I also try to develop a sense of group identity and group esteem. I want students to be proud of being members of our classroom. As a community of learners, we will spend a great deal of time discussing ideas such as respect, cooperation, responsibility, service, and fairness. We will work together, help one another, and make meaningful decisions together. I will do whatever I can to create an emotionally safe, nurturing environment where students feel comfortable taking risks, sharing information, and being themselves. The whole can be greater than the sum of the parts.

Third, quality education focuses directly on the habits of mind and habits of character that students will need in order to make a contribution to society and lead quality lives. I will attempt to connect classroom learning to these higher purposes. Specifically, I hope to show the kids how what they learn in school will help them become lifelong learners, productive workers, active citizens, intelligent consumers, and caring individuals. I seek to empower my students so that they will be able to perform these roles successfully now and in the future. When students understand the purposes of their learning and when they are encouraged to find meaning in it, motivation increases and greater learning gains result.

Fourth, quality education demands high expectations for everyone. All students are capable of achieving excellence. My job involves getting the students to expect great things from themselves. Once students believe in themselves and are motivated to put forth consistent effort, wonderful things start happening. It is my goal to build the students' confidence and nourish the intrinsic motivation that lies inside of them so that they experience the joys of learning. I will demand a great deal of responsibility from everyone, but I will be there to support them every step of the way. I will set them up for success any way I can.

Fifth, quality education requires the active involvement and support of parents. It is crucial for us to remain in close contact throughout the year. Every Monday you will receive a weekly newsletter containing important information about our class. It is absolutely essential that you read this newsletter every week and discuss it with your child. I will also contact you by phone or with a note whenever the need arises. Please feel free to do the same. I am always happy to discuss school matters with you.

Parental involvement and support also means that you closely monitor your child's performance at home and at school. Every time you ask your child about a homework activity, every time you take an interest in one of his or her projects, and every time you make sure your child has a designated time and place for homework, you are showing that you value education and that you think schoolwork is worthy of the time and effort your child puts forth. This is a message your child needs to hear constantly.

I actively encourage parents to volunteer in the classroom. I hope to have parent volunteers in the classroom on a daily basis. The assistance that parents provide is invaluable. For those of you who are interested, I will be distributing a volunteer sheet in the near future. If you are unable to volunteer in the classroom but would like to help out in other ways, such as with xeroxing or by providing supplies, that would be fantastic as well. Any help that you could give us this year would be much appreciated.

There are many more things I would like to share with you about the upcoming year, but I feel it is best if I stop here. In this letter I hope I have made it clear how important it is for all of us to work together this year. When parents, students, and teachers form trusting relationships and work together, then we give the kids their greatest chance for success in the classroom. I hope this letter finds you in good spirits, and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Steve Reifman

Please use the following sheet to provide any information about your child that you believe would help me perform my duties more effectively. You may choose to describe strengths, weaknesses, hopes, fears, previous school experiences, personality characteristics, hobbies, or anything else that you think I would find helpful. Even if you write nothing at all, please print your name and child's name and fill in the date down below so that I know you have read this letter. Thanks.

Child's Name _____
Your Name _____