

Letters of Appreciation

Feeling gratitude and not expressing it
is like wrapping a present and not giving it.

~ William Arthur Ward

This chapter thanks everyone who impacts education. Every day, they show up and work diligently with the resources they can access to make great things happen for our students.

Please consider sharing these letters with staff. I give full permission to copy them, cut them apart and stuff them into people's mailboxes. When people feel appreciated, they often go above and beyond what's expected. I hope I haven't missed anyone. ♥

Let's get this section started:



- New Kinders
- Families, Parents and Caregivers
- Teachers Everywhere
- New Teachers
- Teachers on Call or TTOCs
- Secretaries or Administrative Assistants
- Educational Assistants or SEAs
- Resource Teachers or Special Education Teachers
- Clinicians and Behaviour Specialists
- Child and Youth Care Workers
- Counsellors
- Library Learning Commons Teachers
- Library Technicians



- Music Teachers
- PE Teachers
- General Prep Teachers
- Big Buddy Teachers



- Indigenous Support Workers
- Elders and Knowledge Keepers
- Community Coordinators



- English Language Learners Teachers (ELL Teachers)
- Speech and Language Pathologists
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Teachers



- Occupational Therapists
- Physiotherapists
- District Psychologists
- Hospital Homebound Teachers



- Breakfast Club Coordinators
- Parent Volunteers
- PAC Groups



- Crossing Guards
- Custodians
- Bus Drivers



- Preschool Teachers
- Strong Start Teachers
- Mentor Teachers and Mentee Teachers



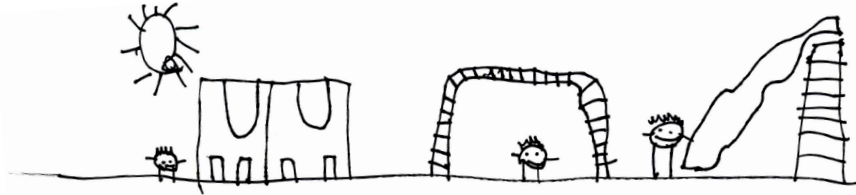
- Helping Teachers
- Teacher Candidates
- School Associates or Sponsor teachers
- Faculty Associates
- Vice-Principals
- Principals
- School Trustees
- Superintendents



And lastly... Meg ♥

Let's start at the beginning.

Hello, New Kinders!



I hope you are really excited about starting school. If you went to your Welcome to Kindergarten session back in the spring, you probably thought you were starting Kindergarten the next day, so that might have been confusing. Your new teachers wanted to meet you, and your grown-ups, and share some ideas to try before school starts.

If you got some items from school, make sure you use them. If you got a pair of scissors, please try them. Don't cut your hair or your clothes, or give your pet a haircut. Get your grown-ups to show you how to hold and use scissors, because we cut a lot in Kindergarten, and it takes patience and practice. If you didn't get scissors, you should ask to try cutting before you come to school.

We print our names a lot in Kindergarten. We print it all the time, and on everything. If it's hard at first, that's okay—but with practice, it will get easier. Try to print in "Propercase", like this: Meghan—not uppercase, like this: MEGHAN.

You will need a really big backpack, a lunchbox, and a water bottle. Practice eating from your lunch containers, so you know how to open and close them. It feels good to do things on your own, which is called being independent. Talk to your grownups about what you'd like for lunch. You could even help make it!

You will probably need a pair of shoes just for school, which we call inside shoes. Please don't wear lace-up shoes unless you can tie them really quickly and tightly. It's really hard to tie up shoelaces. Sometimes kids have the same shoes or gumboots, so it's a good idea to put your name on everything so you can get your things back.

You'll have to do a lot on your own, like changing your shoes, putting on and zipping up your jacket, and packing your backpack. Your teacher can help if you need, but they really want kids to do it on their own. You'll have plenty of time, so don't worry.

♥ Here are my wishes for you:

Be Brave. Be Safe. Be Friendly. Be Curious. Be Kind.

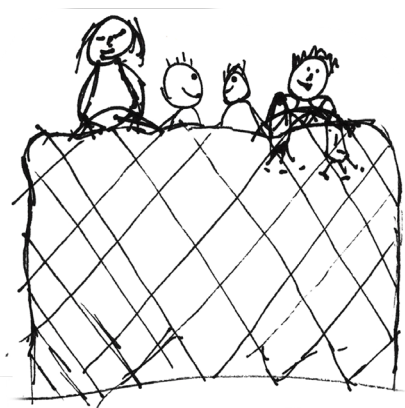
I bet you are going to love Kindergarten! ♥



Dear Families, Parents and Caregivers,

You are your child's first and most important teacher. The way they view and interact with the world comes from you. You probably have a range of feelings about Kindergarten, and any feelings—whether they be positive or negative in nature—will be passed on to your child. Children hold onto our words, even when we think they aren't listening. Try it. Brag about your child to another grown-up when you think they are out of earshot. They can hear you.

When you ask your child about their day at school, ask an open-ended question. Don't ask them, "What did you do at school today?", because they might get into the habit of saying they did nothing, which is very untrue. You could ask questions like: Who did you play with? What was the hardest part of your day? Did you do something kind for someone? Did someone do something kind for you? Children often unpack all their feelings at bedtime, just when you are about to turn off the lights. Listen not only to the words they say but also to the mood in their voice. Connect with your teacher, who, like you, only wants your child to find success and joy in Kindergarten.



Wishing you and your Kinder an amazing journey as they begin school. ♥

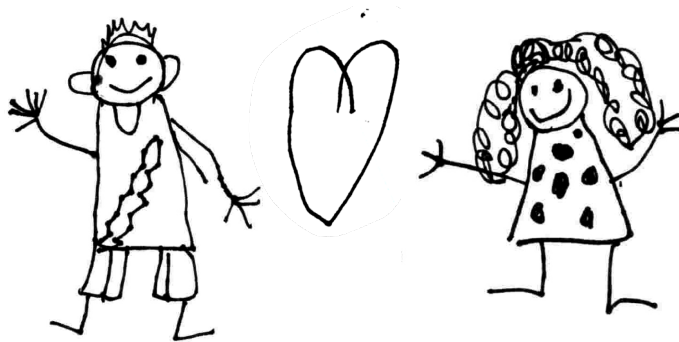
Teachers Everywhere,

Teaching is hard—but you already knew that.

I don't want this to be a whiny, grumbly letter. That doesn't get us anywhere, now, does it?

Thank you for rising each day, especially on the days you want to pull the covers over your head. It's hard to turn off a reflective teaching brain at the end of the day. It seems like we are always in Teacher Mode: planning, preparing, emailing, or developing lessons—our brains are always on. We worry about our students, especially the ones who hold a special place in our hearts. We are our toughest critics. Don't worry about what you didn't do that day—celebrate what you did do. Find a way to recharge each day. Now more than ever, we need teachers. Check in and connect. We are all better for it.

Wishing you find joy in the little moments. ♥



Hello, New Teachers!

You've likely drawn out your dream classroom at least a dozen times. You've probably spent time on Pinterest getting inspired by Reggio classrooms with neutral walls and wooden furniture, featuring amazing play structures. The reality is that when you move in, your new space will likely have only a clock on the wall, student tables and chairs, and a teacher's desk and chair. Your new classroom will likely be as empty as the supermarket shelves were during COVID.

You won't make much money until you've climbed up the salary grid. Our employer could never afford to pay teachers by the hour. The overtime alone for teachers to write report cards would be astronomical. As a new teacher, you should get paid much more than you do. You will quickly realize how much out-of-pocket expenses teachers dish out to make amazing lessons and experiences for their students. Not every teacher does this, but most of us add something to our shopping lists and think nothing of it.

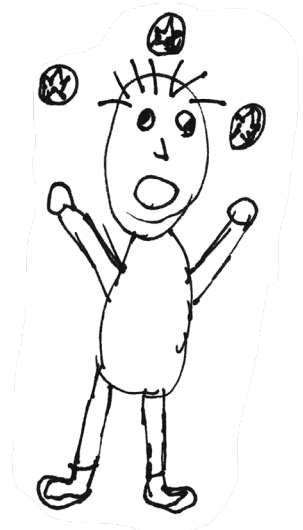
Classrooms today are more diverse than ever. It will be your job to advocate for students who don't have enough, or the right, support in place, which is a never-ending task.

**You did practice juggling in university, right?
Some days, it's hard to keep all the balls in the air.**

I wish there were a one-size-fits-all guidebook to prepare you for teaching. There isn't. Teaching is a lived experience and a different journey for each person.

I wish I could guide you through your first five years to help you navigate the swift learning curve you will face.

Hold on tight and lean into colleagues around you. ♥



Teachers on Call or TTOCs,

Thank you for stepping in when we are away. I'm sorry that sometimes you show up and there's a field trip in the rain or sports day in a heat wave, and you aren't prepared. I'm extra sorry if you thought you were teaching high school PE and then were pulled to teach Kindergarten instead. There should be bonus pay on days that TTOCs get soaking wet, are extra uncomfortable, or sticky. It's really sticky in Kindergarten.

Thank you for leaving us notes that give a little glimpse of the day. You don't have to tell us that it was a bed of roses—we know better. Kids, even as young as Kindergarten, love it when a substitute is there. They know the rules and expectations, but they'll test every boundary.

You won't be able to do Calendar right, and that's okay. The children will probably yell at you the entire time, trying to help you do it right. It's a ritual that we lean into, but I bet doing Calendar as a TTOC feels like rubbing sandpaper on a sunburn. I'm sorry about that.

Once you survive the Calendar rituals, I hope that you can regain control and win them back. Tell a story with funny voices, or pull out a sock puppet and tell jokes. Teach them a fun game you invented that we will have no clue how to replicate. Try anything along those lines. Kinders love to be entertained. Ask the office for blank labels, quickly write out their names, and have the students wear them on their shirts. Knowing who your main characters are as soon as possible will help with your classroom management, and, ultimately, help you survive the day.

Your most important job on a sub day in Kindergarten is to ensure the kids go with the right families. Please don't do what one high school teacher did: open the door at the end of the day, let the Littles walk out without knowing who is taking them, close the door behind them, and shut the blinds. Fortunately, a herd of moms watching this unfold dropped their lattes, stepped in, and matched the kids up correctly. Then they stormed the principal's office to let them know what they had just witnessed. Yeah, don't be that TTOC.

May the days you spend being a substitute go swiftly and smoothly.

Thanks again for stepping in. ♥

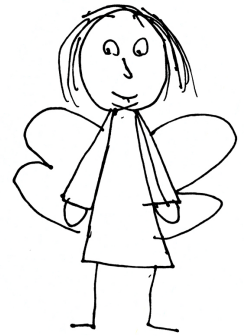


Secretaries or Administrative Assistants,

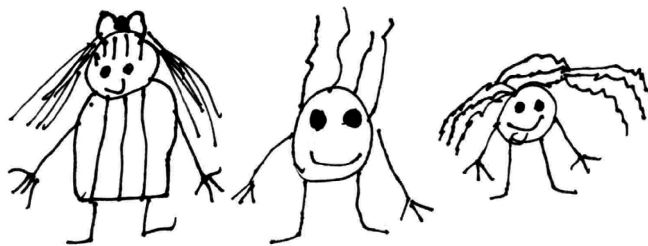
Do you have a pair of hidden angel wings tucked beneath that sweater?

How do you do it? The phone is constantly ringing, visitors are constantly arriving, and students are constantly needing random items. Everyone has a problem for you to solve, and you assist with a smile.

Thank you for the oodles of band-aids and ice packs you hand out. Thank you for calling home when our students bump their heads or are sick. Thank you for being the calm in the storm. Each day seems to unfold in a different, and yet familiar way.

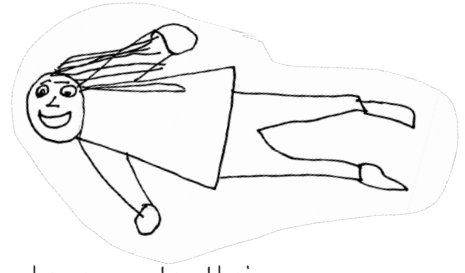


Thank you for loving our children—
we know they love you, too. ♥



Educational Assistants or SEAs,

You. Are. Amazing.



You are the educational equivalent of a firefighter. When a teacher evacuates their class because a student is dysregulated and causing harm, you rush in.

You are ready for anything, and you jump in where you are needed. You work in a variety of environments and alongside many teachers. Some years, you step into a job you didn't even sign up for. I hope that you feel valued for your efforts.

Please advocate for yourself. No one should come to work and get hurt, and yet that happens every day. I encourage you to complete the required forms every time you are injured, without hesitation. You may need that documentation if your injuries are serious enough, so do not dismiss it. Additionally, filling out these safety forms provides evidence that schools are becoming unsafe, and that schools need more staff to support complex students.

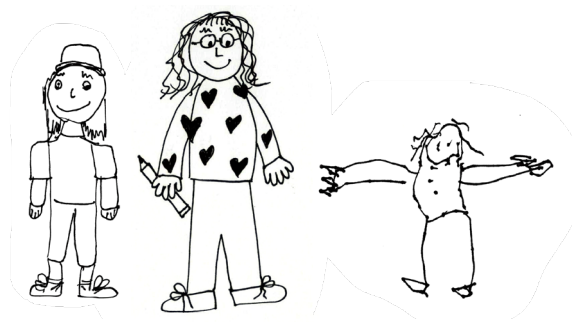
Thank you for chasing down children to keep them safe. Thank you for repeatedly teaching students concepts they weren't ready to learn when we first introduced them. Thank you for checking on them, getting them snacks, finding their lost items, taking them on a break, and, most importantly, loving them.

Thank you for trying different things to connect with children who feel disconnected or are dysregulated. Thank you for watching them on the playgrounds and helping them when they get hurt, physically or emotionally. Thank you for knowing which ones need extra hugs or which ones don't like band-aids. Thank you for helping them work through issues with other children and for communicating with us so we know what happened, too.

Thank you. ♥

Resource Teachers or Special Education Teachers,

Your job is incredibly demanding, and each year it seems to become more complex. You do your best to support so many students, balancing competing needs with compassion and professionalism. You check in on students, write Individual Education Plans (IEPs), respond to families, coordinate supports, follow up on assessments, and navigate an endless stream of paperwork and meetings. You lead difficult conversations with empathy and care, then return the next day, ready to do it all over again.



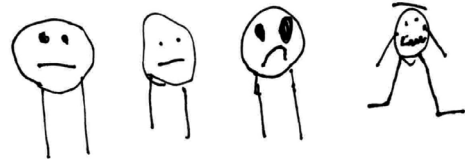
Thank you for your unwavering commitment to our students. Thank you for checking in, advocating, listening, and reminding both students and teachers that they are not alone.

Your support makes a meaningful difference every day. ♥

Clinicians and Behaviour Specialists,

Thank you for all you do to help set our complex learners up for success. Thank you for sharing your specialized knowledge with the school team. Thank you for connecting with teachers, resource teams, administrators, and families, and for serving as an important bridge among the people who support a child. You help us better understand a child and which supports, strategies and adaptations may help them thrive.

Your collaboration, expertise, and care make a difference. ♥

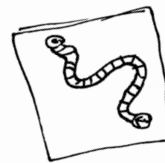
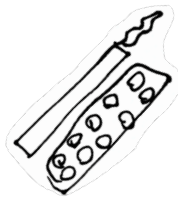


Child and Youth Care Workers,

Thank you for working with our students in so many ways. Thank you for popping into classrooms to check in and help students get settled at the beginning of the day. You build trusting relationships with students who need additional support. Thank you for coaching students through problem-solving conversations. You help students in moments where they are dysregulated, stressed or in conflict.

Thank you for building meaningful relationships with students and helping them feel safe, connected, and understood. You meet children where they are, help them develop the skills they need to navigate school and relationships, and remind them that they have people in their corner. Thank you for teaching students different self-regulation strategies such as breath work, movement breaks, calming tools, or reinforcing school-wide initiatives. You are often running all day, connecting with students and providing support during recess, lunch, and transitions.

Thank you for all that you do. ♥

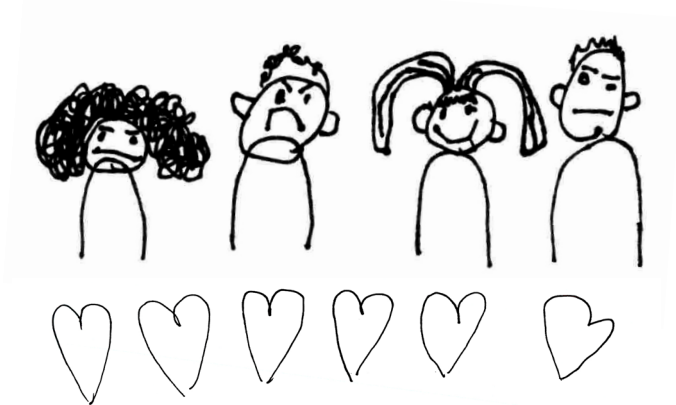


Counsellors,

You are the calm in a storm for a child, their family and their teachers.

Thank you for being a safe person for students to turn to. You listen, support, guide, and help children navigate the social and emotional challenges that can sometimes get in the way of learning. Thank you for supporting students who experience anxiety, grief, stress, conflict, or difficult life circumstances. Thank you for helping us better understand and connect with children whose experiences and challenges may not always be visible to us. Thank you for swooping in, connecting with them, and giving them a break from the classroom.

Thank you for caring for our students. ♥

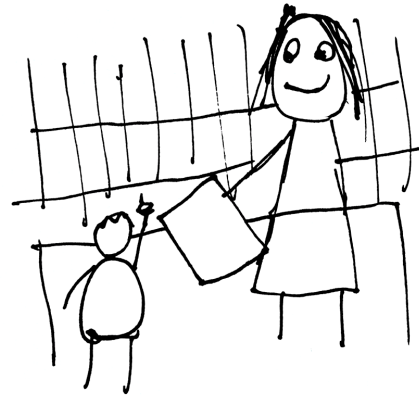


Library Learning Commons Teachers,

Thank you for providing interesting lessons for our students. It's a prep period for us, so we don't see the magic of your lessons, but we hear about the learning as the children trickle back into our classrooms.

We feel it: a new enthusiasm on a topic, a story that was particularly moving, or a hands-on learning opportunity they enjoyed. Thank you for helping children discover new books, find answers to their questions, and develop the skills to navigate an ever-growing world of information.

Thank you for creating a space where children can wonder, explore, imagine, and learn. ♥



Library Technicians,

Thank you for all you do behind the scenes to keep our libraries running smoothly. Thank you for printing overdue notes for families when books aren't returned, and for helping children find books on topics they are curious about. Thank you for remembering that a child wanted a particular book and for stashing it away for them. Thank you for ordering new books and for reordering favourite books that are tattered and torn from overuse.

Thank you for making creative displays, such as a snowman or pumpkins stacked from old encyclopedias. Thank you for pulling out books as the year unfolds with different holidays, seasons or celebrations. Thank you for ensuring we have books on sensitive topics and for having books that represent different cultures or diverse families.



**Books are such a gift for teachers and students—
thank you for supporting us through literature. ♥**

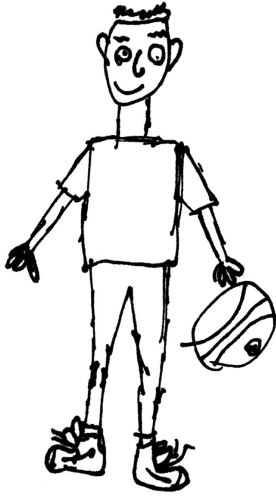
Music Teachers,

Thank you for taking the children for our prep block. We don't see what you've taught them, but we hear it. We hear little snippets of them singing songs as they walk back in the halls, get ready for outside, or line up to go home.

**They don't always get the lyrics right,
but what they do get is a song in their heart. ♥**

Thank you for taking on school-wide concerts and performances. Kindergarteners always steal the show—but you already knew that.





 PE Teachers,

Thank you so much for taking our kids and running the wiggles out of them.

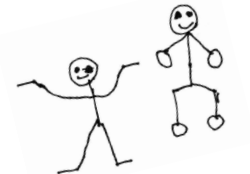
They love going to the gym because they already know it'll be fun. Thank you for telling us when they got hurt, or if they didn't listen or play fair. That's important information for us to know and follow up on. We aren't sure how you manage the noise and enthusiasm of twenty Littles in such a big, echoey space, but we are very grateful you do. ♥



General Prep Teachers,

Thank you for taking our kids for a bit so we can get done as much prep as we can in what little time we have. Thank you for showing up on time—none of us have enough prep time to do our jobs, so every minute counts. Thank you for teaching the children interesting things or trying fun stuff with them.

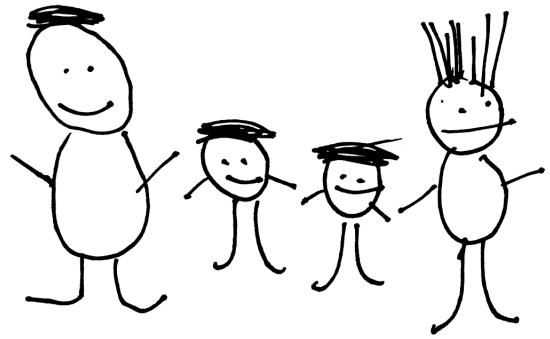
We appreciate you! ♥



Big Buddy Teachers,

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to come and do fun stuff with your Little Buddies.

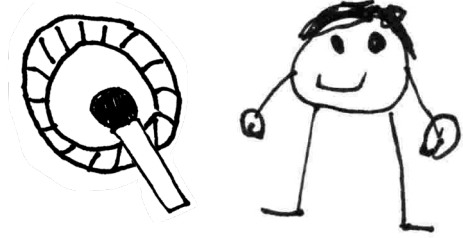
You are the highlight of our week, and we love connecting with our Big Buddies for activities such as reading, drawing, playing games, dancing, and crafts. We also really like seeing our Big Buddies outside. Although not every Big Buddy/Little Buddy pairing is a perfect match, it is truly special to see when strong bonds develop. ♥



Indigenous Support Workers,

Thank you for helping us learn more about your culture. We are so curious, but we are nervous, too. We want to be sure we don't overstep or get it wrong. We continue to learn more about the truth of what happened to generations of Indigenous children and families. It is a painful and devastating part of our shared history, and we have a responsibility to continue learning, listening, and supporting the ongoing work of reconciliation.

Thank you for helping us. ♥

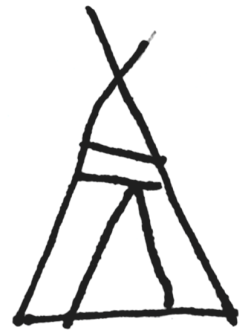




Elders and Knowledge Keepers,



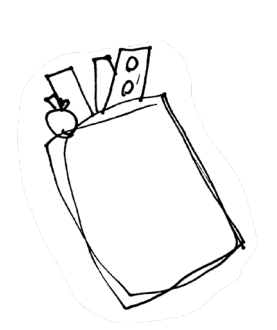
Thank you for sharing your wisdom, teachings,
culture and language with us.



We are grateful for the knowledge and stories you share. Thank you for helping us learn about the lands on which we live, play, work and learn. Your presence helps us learn about the histories, cultures, languages, lands, and traditions of the Indigenous Peoples connected to our communities. Thank you for helping us learn with greater respect and understanding. Thank you for guiding us on the ongoing journey of truth and reconciliation. Your work matters, and we appreciate you. ♥

Community Coordinators,

Thank you for bridging students, their families, and staff, and helping them access support from their communities. Thank you for empowering our most vulnerable students and families through different programs and services. Thank you for helping families connect with organizations that provide food, housing, recreation, health, cultural, or social supports. Thank you for working alongside teachers, counsellors, administrators, Child and Youth Care Workers, and other school staff to coordinate supports for children and families.



Your work reminds us that supporting children is truly a community effort. ♥

English Language Learner (ELL) Teachers,

Thank you for supporting our multilingual learners and their families. Although English Language Learner support is not always available in every Kindergarten classroom or school district, your guidance, expertise, and resourcefulness are invaluable. Thank you for helping us access resources that welcome and support newcomer families as they begin their journey in our school communities.

Thank you, too, for being there during emergency evacuation drills. Your calm presence and reassurance help children feel safe during what can be a confusing and frightening experience.

We deeply appreciate your kindness, advocacy, and support. ♥



Speech and Language Pathologists,

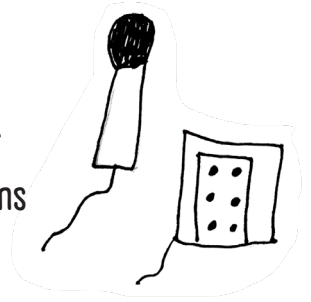
Your caseloads are immense, yet you continue to make a meaningful difference in so many students' lives. Thank you for the practical activities, strategies, and guidance you share to help us support language development in our classrooms. Thank you for reminding us which speech sounds and language skills are still developing, giving us confidence to support our students with patience and understanding.

Your expertise, encouragement, and collaboration help us better meet every child's needs. We are grateful for all that you do. ♥



Deaf and Hard of Hearing Teachers,

Thank you for supporting students who are deaf or hard of hearing and for advocating for the tools and accommodations they need to succeed.



Thank you for championing sound field systems for classrooms, which benefit every learner. Microphone systems reduce strain on teachers' voices while making spoken language clearer and more accessible. Whether we are teaching phonics, rhyming, blending, or simply sharing a story, these systems help ensure every child can hear and participate.

Thank you for reminding us that many young children experience temporary hearing loss due to frequent ear infections and colds, making clear access to spoken language especially important in the early years. ♥

Occupational Therapists,

Thank you for taking the time to observe students when we have concerns about their development and classroom participation.

Your expertise and thoughtful observations help us better understand each child's strengths and needs.



We enjoy watching you interact with children during play. They are often eager to show you what they can do. You have a remarkable way of focusing on the child you are observing, while making the experience feel natural, positive, and inclusive. Thank you for sharing practical strategies and realistic suggestions that we can implement in our classrooms using the resources we have available. ♥

Physiotherapists,

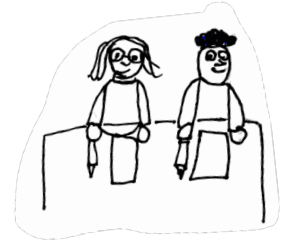
Thank you for supporting our students as they build the strength, balance, coordination, and confidence to move safely and successfully throughout their school day. ♥

Your expertise in gross motor development helps children participate more fully in classroom routines and everyday learning experiences. From supporting gross-motor development to recommending equipment such as walkers and standers, you help remove physical barriers so students can participate more fully in school life. Thank you for working alongside teachers, families, and support staff to help every child move, play, and learn.



District Psychologists,

Your caseloads are immense, and your workload is heavy. You are spread thinly across many schools and work closely with several Resource departments. We appreciate how thorough and prepared you are in meetings with parents when sharing educational assessments.



Thank you for helping us better understand the learners in front of us. ♥

Your assessments, observations, expertise, and thoughtful recommendations help teachers and families see both a child's strengths and challenges, and determine how we can best support them. Thank you for helping us look beyond the behaviour or the struggle to understand the whole child. Those conversations are not easy, and we are very grateful for your work.

Hospital Homebound Teachers,



Our family is very familiar with your expertise, as our eldest son had kidney cancer when he was eight years old. I was so glad you came into our home to help him catch up on his missed lessons. You worked with his beloved classroom teacher to select lessons that would help him stay on track.

I heard chatter, laughter and learning again.

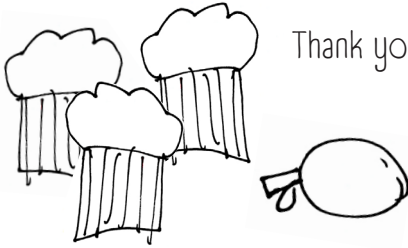
You are part teacher and part counsellor, and for that, our family and many others are so grateful. ♥

Breakfast Club Coordinator,

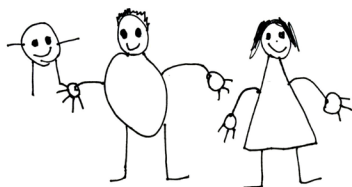
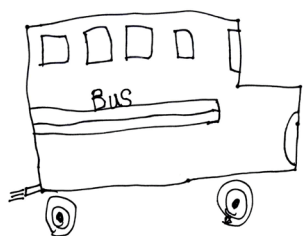
You make schools smell like home. ♥



Even the occasional smell of burnt toast from an industrial toaster can bring warmth and welcome to a school. When food programs are for everyone, no one is stigmatized by needing them. There is no longer any shame in needing a meal or a snack. Children cannot be expected to learn on an empty tummy.



Thank you for filling up children's bellies so we can fill up their brains.

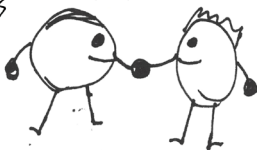


Parent Volunteers,

Thank you for answering the call when teachers ask for parent volunteers to help with field trips, special projects, and with all the little things that make a classroom community special. Thank you for riding on a bus, walking in the rain, and helping a child pick the perfect pumpkin. Thank you for watching a handful of children get excited about learning,. Thank you for reminding us that you don't know how we do it, and that you are grateful for us.



Thank you. ♥



PAC groups,



Thank you for your commitment to your child's school.

Thank you for trudging out for evening meetings to plan how to raise funds for the items your school needs.

Thank you for handing out hot lunch orders, which is a big deal to young children. In the words of one Kinder, "Hot lunch is the best because it's LUNCH and it's HOT." Thank you for supporting our most at-risk families with free hot lunch or a treat on these special days, too. Those children benefit greatly from that experience.

Thank you for allowing teachers to buy items for their classrooms, and for giving brand-new teachers a little extra funding to get started. Thank you for paying for field trips for children who can't afford to pay, and for offsetting the cost of busing—field trips can be expensive.

Thank you for organizing Fun Nights for Families. The joy on the children's faces at these events is unmistakable, and so are the connections that help build a strong and vibrant school community. Thank you for Movie Nights. They are not for the faint of heart, can be wonderfully sticky, and are thoroughly enjoyed by the children.

Thank you for getting gaming licences and other grants. It's a lot of paperwork and a thankless job, but we appreciate it.

Thank you for fundraising for playground equipment. It's incredibly expensive, and, without your fundraising efforts, many school playgrounds would be pretty bare.

Thank you for supporting your principal. It's the loneliest job. They have a vision for their school, regardless of how long they will be there. Their budgets are getting smaller every year, so thank you for working with them to set goals, plan events, and raise much-needed funds.

Thank you for supporting families with Christmas hampers. Thank you for recognizing that some inner-city schools can't raise as much money from their community through school-based events. Thank you for donating to their PAC groups, too.

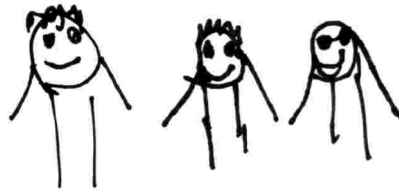
Thank you for all that you do to care for our students, staff, admin and our families. ♥

Crossing Guards,

Thank you for being a familiar face each morning and kindly greeting families, no matter the weather. You might not know it, but you are a hero to our littlest learners. I'm sorry that some drivers are jerks and speed through school zones, or, worse, don't have any respect for your safety and try to cut in front as you walk back to the curb. When your high-visibility vest doesn't do the trick, you could try standing out there with a hair dryer pointed in their direction, or writing in a notepad with the expression of a thoroughly annoyed teacher.



Thank you for keeping our families safe. ♥



Custodians,

Can you put a work order in for us? We need paper towels that actually absorb water. School paper towels are the worst. It actually repels puddles of water. We've conducted extensive longitudinal studies and collectively agree, so it's a fact.

Thank you for sweeping up sparkly dirt each day. Glitter must frustrate you deeply. Thank you for washing sticky surfaces. Our young students lie, play, and literally eat off the floors.

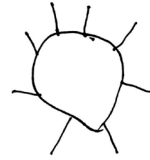
We hope you enjoy our artwork and our smiling photos as you clean. Our room is a hub of excitement each day, and you see evidence of this learning from the playdough squished into the carpet, to the dried paint drops everywhere, to the sand on the floor.



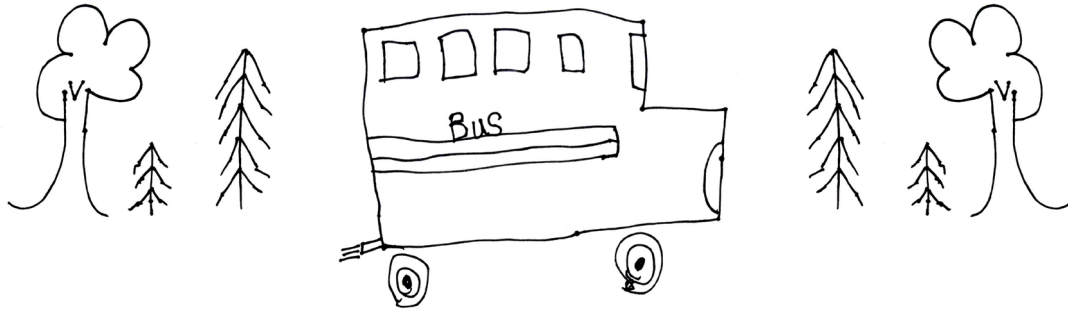
Thank you. ♥

Bus drivers,

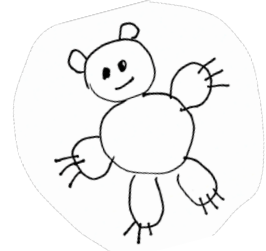
Kindergarteners don't even know you, and
yet are so enamoured by the thought of you.



Buses are both exciting and scary for young children. They love the thought of going on a bus, but driving anywhere without their grown-ups, and not in a booster seat, is confusing. They can't help but leave their mark with finger drawings on your foggy windows. They are your tiniest riders, but your biggest fans. They easily fit three to a seat with their feet dangling far from the floor. Thank you for reminding us about the bus rules that our teacher just reviewed. We know they are important, and these rules help keep everyone safe. Thank you for taking us places, and for being patient when we sing The Wheels on the Bus on repeat. ♥



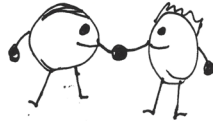
 **Preschool Teachers,**



Thank you for being a family's first experience with school.

Students who went to preschool transition better to full-day Kindergarten. They understand there are routines to learn and follow, and procedures for playtime and cleaning up. Preschool should be free for families so that all children have a level playing field for learning. Thank you for starting conversations with families when you are concerned about a child's development. Thank you for helping families access support before their child starts school.

We appreciate you! ♥



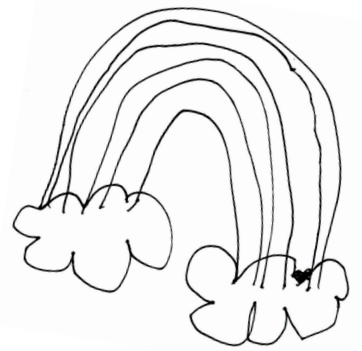
Strong Start Teachers,

Your work is very important. Thank you for offering fun, hands-on activities for children and their caregivers to enjoy together. Thank you for opening the doors to school for our youngest learners and their families. Through play, conversation, and connection, you help children build confidence and a love of learning while helping families feel welcome in the school community. You are often one of the first friendly faces families meet at school—and that first connection matters. Thank you for putting up signs that say “No Phones Allowed” and addressing this if needed.



You know families need to reconnect, play, and reprioritize their relationships with the people right in front of them. ♥

Mentor Teachers and Mentee Teachers,



Many school districts offer mentorship programs for new teachers.

These programs often include release time, allowing Mentors to visit Mentees in their classrooms to observe, support, and offer guidance. Mentees may also visit their Mentors' classrooms to observe effective practices, ask questions, and reflect on their own teaching. Thank you to the many Mentor Teachers who take on this extra unpaid work, and to the many Mentee Teachers who recognize that they would benefit from this support.

**It's not easy to ask for help, but both the Mentor and Mentee
can greatly benefit from this relationship.**

I should know. I adore my Mentee, Tracey. She makes me a better Mentor, and has become a dear friend and a mentor to me, too. ♥



Helping Teachers,



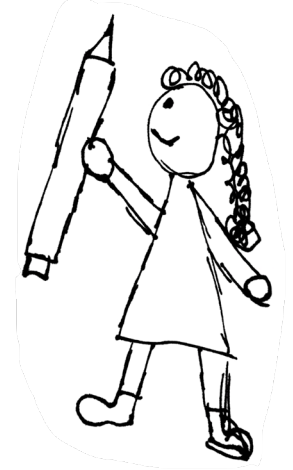
You are hired to inspire us and nudge us along so we stay current with new trends and practices in education. You host after-school workshops that spill into the evenings and offer delicious snacks. You plan for 30 participants, but you know only 15 will likely show up after their hectic teaching days. You email various groups of teachers links to programs and resources to check out. You advocate for teachers and, when possible, add books to our classroom libraries. You are available to come in, support us, or demonstrate innovative lessons and new teaching strategies. You've been pulled away from your role to cover classrooms when we ran out of substitutes. Your responsibilities, emails, and regular duties pile up as you balance your regular job with on-the-fly substituting, and that's very unfair.

**We see you, and we thank you for your efforts,
expertise, inspiration and time. ♥**

Hello, Teacher Candidates!

Sigh. Yes, I took a deep breath before I began writing this letter. You should also take a deep breath or two.

My favourite classroom management strategy is to say, “If you can hear me, take a breath.” If my students don’t hear me, I repeat it. It works for children and adults alike, instantly changing the energy in the room. I didn’t invent it, but I think it’s fabulous. Put that one in your back pocket.



Universities think they have prepared you for the unmanageable demands by pummeling you with enormous projects, group work, presentations, field studies, and intensive unit planning in an effort to help you build stamina. Sorry to break it to you, but the real classroom is unlike anything you can truly prepare for.

Your School Advisor will help you get acquainted with the students, routines and school community during your practicum. Your philosophies and experiences won’t be the same, since no two teachers are exactly alike. Hopefully, you will feel supported and comfortable as you try the activities you have planned. Try to get your feet wet as quickly as possible in your practicum. We can’t learn to swim by looking at the water. We just have to jump in and go for it.

I wish I could tell you teaching is easy and gets easier with time. It does not. You have to be ready for anything in this job. What I know now and what I knew back when I was a Baby Teacher are very different. Teaching was so overwhelming for me. In fact, I got stuck in survival mode, and I didn’t even realize it. About ten years into teaching, I took on my Graduate Diploma and laddered those credits towards a Master’s. My courses pushed me to reflect on my teaching and ask myself why I was doing what I was doing. I must admit it was uncomfortable—I had become so rigid and was oblivious to it. If you are considering working toward your Graduate Diploma or Master’s degree, I highly recommend it; it was key to my personal growth.

We want to keep you in this profession, but it’s really hard at first. You will be pulled in every direction. You might not want to come back the next day, next week, or next month. I’ve had a couple of years like that. Luckily, I had support to get through it, and I knew, deep down, I loved the job enough to stay.

They say teachers make more minute-by-minute decisions than a brain surgeon. I believe that to be true. Now more than ever, our students talk over each other and demand our attention at the same time. You’ll need to help them communicate with you more effectively. If I had a dollar for every time a small child poked me in my tummy to get my attention, I could probably retire.

Please connect with others as you begin this journey. It helps to know that you are not alone.

It can be a bumpy ride sometimes, but it can be amazing, too. ♥

School Associates or Sponsor Teachers,

Thank you for taking on a student teacher, since you know what it's like to be one. Giving back to our profession is important.



May you show that you also make mistakes, which will help your student teacher feel safe when they are being critiqued. Student teachers are quite hard on themselves, hyperfocusing on what they didn't do in a lesson, so help them zoom out and notice all the amazing things they accomplished. Remind them of the child they've connected with that week, so when they move beyond your classroom, they will continue to foster connections with challenging students. We are all so much better for taking on student teachers, or, as I affectionately call them, *Baby Teachers*. ♥

Faculty Associates,

You have a challenging job of watching young, inspired teachers hit the trenches. You try to prepare them for the challenges they face, but you know it's not possible. Teaching is a lived experience, and it's best done through a lens of reflection. Every classroom is unique. Its composition, complexity, and learning environment are shaped by the students within it, as well as the teacher's philosophy and pedagogy.



Thank you for taking on this challenging role, supporting many Teacher Candidates at once, and interacting with many School Associates simultaneously. May you continue to remember why you wanted to support new teachers. Encourage them to find joy in the little moments—this will help them when they question why they wanted to join the ranks of teaching. Don't scare them too much, as we need them, but don't coddle them, either.

This work isn't for the faint of heart—but you already know that. ♥

Vice-Principals,

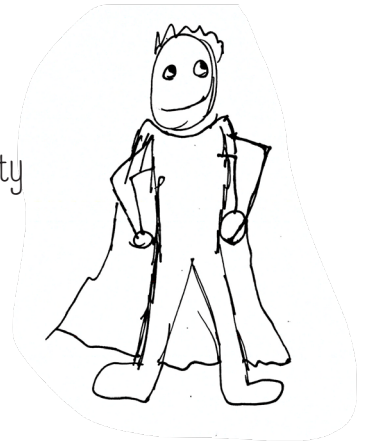
You have a hard job, balancing a teaching load with the pressure-cooker experience of a part-time admin role. You can't do either job 100% because you hold neither position 100% of the time. That's the math. Give yourself grace, especially as you begin a new school. Your community will be curious about you. Everyone makes mistakes while learning, but unfortunately, yours are often more visible than most.

They say it's lonely at the top. The weight of the world must be extra heavy some days. Lean on your principal to see how they balance it all.

If parents are upset about an issue and you step up for us, thank you for having our backs. Please remind them to talk to us first. Parents often like to go to the top before talking to us. You know that's the wrong route, but they might need a gentle reminder.

Please come in and see your Kinders learn and play. They'll want to impress you, so if it feels overwhelming because they all talk at once, then you are beginning to form connections with your littlest fans. If your teachers look exhausted and worn out, feel free to take the lead and read a favourite story or two. It might just remind you of why you loved teaching in the first place.

Thank you for all you do. ♥



Principals,

Young children think you have superpowers. It must be because parents often tell children to behave or they will be sent to the principal's office, but you know that we seldom send a child to the office in Kindergarten.

If you get hugged to pieces when you enter our rooms, it's because the children want to win you over. Their lack of stature means these strong hugs will probably end up in unwanted areas. They are going to hug you regardless; there is no easy way around it.

Over my career, I've noticed two types of principals. One type is a former early primary teacher who understands the tensions Kindergarten teachers face and goes out of their way to support them. The other type is not familiar with the intricacies of Kindergarten. They may be concerned about the unpredictability of small children, who are never afraid to speak what's on their minds or in their hearts. Either way, it's entertaining on our end.

I have some advice for you.

Don't be afraid of Kindergarten children. They will stand too close and probably on your toes. They will ask you odd questions or tell you something that happened to them three weeks ago outside at recess. They will want you to know all the details. They are amazing, tiny human beings with big hearts and big ideas.

Small children can often experience a range of emotions, but they generally calm down quickly. Occasionally, we have students whose needs we can't meet because the teacher-to-student ratio is unbalanced and we are stretched too thin. If the behaviours are severe or bolting is a concern, support your staff with radios so they can get help quickly. How else can teachers be in two places at once? They can't run after one child while 19 others remain unattended. You should have a radio with you at all times, too.

Kinders will notice and comment on your new tie, shiny shoes, coffee breath, haircut, new bracelet, or bright lipstick. These comments are true to them, so don't take them too personally. One child told a colleague that she "lost her eyelashes," which was partially true because she was between eyelash extension appointments. Kindergarteners don't have filters. It's an interesting quality, and a universal trait.

They usually think you and the secretary are related and live in the same house. They likely think your house is close to the school, but there aren't any longitudinal studies to prove that theory.

They often think their teachers sleep in the classroom each night, even though we've told them otherwise. They don't believe it until they see us buying toilet paper and personal items at the store—we actually left the building. They are in shock to see this firsthand and will remember this incredible encounter for months to come.

Please support your early primary teachers with your limited budgets. Teachers beg, borrow, and buy things for their classrooms to teach a specialized grade. Regular funds should support and maintain a play-based learning environment, which is the goal of Full Day Kindergarten. We can't teach with rocks, sticks, and pinecones alone, and teachers should not fund public education with their salaries. If your teachers have a wish list, find a way, a grant or some money. Even fully stocked classrooms need to replace overused or broken items. It's no fun to play with a car that only has two wheels.

If you come into our classrooms and it's mayhem, well, it's mayhem. If you happen to walk by and it's quiet, pop in and check that out, too. Our lessons are brief, so you might not always see important learning unfolding. If you see what it looks like to play all day, well, that's not a bad thing. We know children need to learn in different ways and through different modalities. Play should continue far beyond the Kindergarten year without any shame or explanation.

Treat your Vice-Principal like your right hand. Please never lose sight of talking to them. They likely want a role similar to yours one day, but for now, they are trying to balance something that is already out of balance. They know their teaching needs to be exemplary, as they have a herd of parents watching them. They know they have a staff who want a piece of them. They are trying to learn the ropes as quickly as they can. Being a VP must sometimes feel like Mission Impossible, but you were there, too.

Thank you for not losing sight of the shared goal:

What's best for kids?

Balancing all of that is no easy task. ♥



School Trustees,

The public has elected you to strengthen the education process in your area.

You work closely with the school district's policies to support their vision and improve learning outcomes. You work with other trustees to make decisions. This work is not easy. Thank you for advocating for children and families to ensure that all students have opportunities to learn, belong, and thrive. Thank you for listening carefully, weighing differing viewpoints, and having the courage to make decisions that serve the well-being of students, families, and the broader community.

Thank you for remembering that teachers need books on sensitive topics and culturally diverse stories that reflect the families in their schools. Thank you for serving with integrity, compassion, independent thought, and a steadfast commitment to public education.

**Thank you for supporting inclusive learning environments
where every student feels seen, valued, and respected. ♥**



Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents

You have a really big job, which is too big for me to unpack. With a team of experts, you roll out new initiatives and develop strategic plans. You prioritize spending and staffing decisions that impact the school level. These decisions cannot be easy and likely come with tugs from different directions. Every day, you balance competing needs, perspectives, and priorities while keeping students at the heart of your work.

You understand the complex needs of different school communities in your district. You help bring together schools, families, caregivers, educators, support staff, and community partners to build strong, connected learning communities.

When families feel seen, heard, and welcomed, students benefit, too.

Thank you for supporting inclusive schools where all children can belong, including students with disabilities and those whose identities and life experiences create additional barriers to participation. Your leadership helps shape a culture where differences are respected, strengths are celebrated, and every child has opportunities to learn and thrive.

Please focus on funding early learning programs so you will have a strong foundation of learners who will later fill up your schools. And while you spend so much time caring for entire school communities, I hope you also make time to care for yourselves. Healthy, supported leaders are better able to support others.

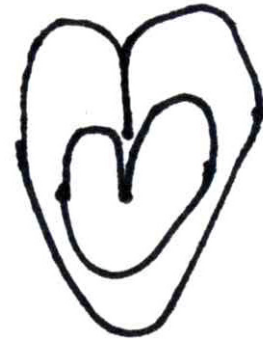
Thank you. ♥



And lastly...

 **Dear Meg.**

You had this enormous project in your heart for a long time. It has been a messy journey to unpack all of this, and you hate messes. But what you do like is to tell a story and offer little nuggets of advice in the hope that it can help another teacher avoid the same mistakes you've made.



You talk to yourself. You laugh out loud at some of the memories you've had along the way. You'll never forget the time a Kinder pulled out deodorant for Show and Tell and told the children, "You put this under your armpits," and then watched a few of his classmates shiver at the news. Your brain realized that there might have been other unusual items he could have chosen to show off, so you are grateful he settled on deodorant.

Your cheeks burn at some of the shame you still carry. You didn't mean to destroy the carpet when you made papier-mache piggy banks with your K/1 class 25 years ago. The janitor and principal have likely long since forgotten, and the subsequent teacher would have been grateful for new vinyl flooring when you moved out. It's okay. You can let it go now.

As you prepare to hit publish on your Teacher's Guide that you feel vulnerable about having shared too much or that what you've shared is not interesting or insightful. These were Ah-ha moments to you, but they might not be for everyone. You might wonder if you missed the mark, and that's okay, too. Just like teaching tiny humans, it's nearly impossible to turn off a reflective teacher's brain.

Teaching is like that. Writing is like that. Making papier-mache pigs is like that. You just have to Let It Go.

As you wrap up this project, I hope you feel that you've done enough, researched enough, reached out to enough actual experts, reflected enough, connected enough, and revised enough.

Your best is enough.

Good job, kid. ♥