March 26, 2021: Learning for Adults and Children

Dear CDS Community,

This week offered the community a number of ways to learn together. Monday night, our third "Soup for Change" event (this year called "Soup for Change Deconstructed") provided us with the opportunity to learn from the seventh graders. Inspired by what they have studied about intersectionality in Humanities and verbatim and Black theater in Drama, they created short plays based on Dashka Slater's *The 57 Bus* and Moisés Kaufman's *The Laramie Project*. This work will help to raise money for San Francisco's Transgender District. It's rewarding for me to see how our students are putting their learning into action.

Wednesday night, I had the honor of hosting a discussion called "Screens During COVID: A Balanced Approach to Kids' Technology Use." The event was sponsored by SPEAK and the panel included Michael Rich, Catherine Steiner-Adair, and our own CDS parent, Danielle Ramo-Larios.

The next day, several heads of school had the opportunity for some follow-up, and this intimate conversation further reinforced the ideas that came up on Wednesday night and offered us time for reflection. I have spent part of my life as a technologist, working to develop early technology-based programming for students and companies in the 1990s. Even then, I realized the incredible power of technology as a TOOL. One thing I always have in mind when engaging with technology is asking myself the question: "who is in charge?" If it's me, then fine; keep using a powerful tool for my own purposes. If I honestly reply that the technology is in charge, then that's my sign to make a change. I think of this when engaging in technology conversations with my children. Asking yourself, as you or your child pick up a device: is the use of technology additive? Is the interaction or experience better or is the use habitual? Even a game can be additive when it involves friends and when we play together as a family. The important part is to reflect on who is in charge: you or the device?

One of the most important themes that came up on Wednesday night and the follow-up

conversation on Thursday was the importance of adults modeling appropriate use of technology. If we are constantly distracted by our phones, our children will notice. When are the moments that technology is put away and everyone is doing something together? It could be a walk, a meal, a conversation, or a game. Ramen Fury is our new family favorite. There are some amazing new games out there!

Dr. Michael Rich provided the three b's or Killer B's – Be Mindful, Be Balanced, Be Present. If we really did keep these three B's in mind, we would have a solid tool that we can use for family and individual reflection about technology use.

Additionally, the Digital Wellness Lab offers specific tips and ideas aligned to the ages of your children. Hot tip: this site is not just about technology; there are many other wellness topics that are useful.

Catherine Steiner-Adair suggested that we all need to bring back boredom. She suggested we challenge our children to think about something they had fun doing yesterday and do more of it. In the Lower School coffee this morning, some other ideas came up:

- Responding to "I'm bored" with a suggestion of a potential chore seemed to motivate the child to find something to do.
- Get a puppy! OR, if that is too dramatic a response, offer to walk a neighbor or friend's puppy.
- Swap toys with friends or even putting different toys in a box and then pulling them out a few weeks later so they are fresh. Often too much choice can make a decision hard.
- Play board games or outdoor games
- Build a pillow or blanket fort
- Or one of my favorites – build a "recycle city." My children knew how to safely use a glue gun at an early age and all of our recyclables lived at least one more life as parking garages for cars, houses for action figures, environments for stuffed animals, or their own games.

Many questions came up in the event about setting technology limits and the suggestion was to try not to use technology as a carrot or a stick. Our role as caregivers is to be the supporter and balancer. We can do this by setting limits that are reasonable rather than reactionary.

We are all in this together and the opportunity to continue to learn and share is

reaffirming that technology is not going away, so it is in our own best interests to find ways to help set internal boundaries.

In previous emails, we shared ways to stand up against hate, and most recently, anti-Asian violence. I know our students are working to make the world a safer and more inclusive place, and their engagement and the learning opportunities they provide us humble me every day. Special thanks to a fourth-grade student who allowed me to share some of his work today during the assembly. **The children are leading us and now it's up to us to follow.**

Warmly,
Shelly