



Dear Lower School Families,

As I write this letter to you I am reminded of how quickly a year can pass. It was this time last year that I was unpacking boxes from my family's move to Providence while *finally* enjoying a shortened commute to work and getting to know just a smidge more about Wheeler every day. Much like the fall months, the spring was spent learning about Wheeler's traditions and how to continue them under entirely new circumstances. I think 'double whammy' is the appropriate term for that experience.

And yet, we were able to have a closing ceremony that celebrated the success of each grade and provide a space for our 5th-grade students to share the accomplishments of their time in the Lower School. We ended our year at the Farm with a festive car parade to celebrate all that we—students, families, and teachers— were able to create, learn, and accomplish in those final three months. I know this past spring was not an ordinary Wheeler year but I am still inspired by and appreciative of the ways the entire Lower School community was able to partner with one another to get through a challenging time. If you are new to Wheeler this year, know that you are joining a special community of families and teachers that will quickly and warmly welcome you as they welcomed me.

I'm excited to know that writing to you at this moment means we are ready to begin a new school year. Angell Building has been void of the familiar sounds of energy and joy and I think every teacher would agree with me in saying that we are so very eager to welcome our students and families back to campus. As the Lower School plans for re-opening our goals are two-fold: to provide a safe environment for students to learn, teachers to teach; and to continue offering a quality academic program that is complemented by a focus on the social-emotional well-being of our students. We would all agree that remote learning was challenging for our youngest learners, and in ways that include more than just their academic engagement. Using our [SEL guiding principle](#) to anchor our approach, we will use the RULER program from the Yale Institute of Emotional Intelligence to complement the myriad of ways we already teach emotional awareness in our classrooms.

In my final June update to families, I mentioned that the Lower School will be expanding the Unity & Diversity classes of 4th and 5th grade to include the remainder of the division, Nursery through 3rd grade. This

dedicated class will teach students about race, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Among many other resources, we are using [Pollyanna's Racial Literacy Curriculum](#). We are ready to do more of this work because we know our students are ready and their existence in a socially just world depends on our ability to embed our mission into every nook and cranny of our program.

As we plan for the fall, there are many people working diligently to make sure we return to campus safely and on time with a quality program that families expect. We appreciate the work of the Healthy 20-21 Task Force in creating our Reopening Guide and urge you to read it in its entirety. In the coming weeks, I will share more details about a day in the life of our students (i.e. arrival, dismissal, lunch, recess, etc.). There are new protocols to learn, new ways of moving about campus, and all while trying to reconcile the spring we have experienced with the new normal of a new school year. For an adult, this can be difficult to process and for children, we know it can be significant. We are committed to moving forward in partnership with you and in service to our kids. There's no doubt that we will look back on these moments in awe of what we were able to accomplish—both as individuals and as a collective.

In gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Felicia M. Vinces". The signature is written in a dark ink on a light-colored background.

Felicia M. Vinces, Head of Lower School