

FRANCIS W. PARKER CHARTER ESSENTIAL SCHOOL
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Thoughts on Perseverance

This week, my Friday note gets its inspiration, in large part, from students and community members who are working very hard to accomplish their schoolwork, to overcome difficulties, to stay in touch with friends and for some, to manage feelings of loneliness, uncertainty, and sadness.

Students' experiences range from those who enthusiastically dive into their studies each morning to those who find they can barely get out of bed each day. We accept them where they are, noting progress of any kind, and gently encourage them to take the step forward in their studies or lives that makes the most sense for them. I notice that students are working hard. They accept tough feedback at times, and they listen to ideas about how they might make changes, adjust course, and try again. They are sticking with things that challenge them, and they are communicating their concerns to parents, teachers, and others.

This week, some moments were striking in their authenticity:

- A student described how he adapted his senior project when unavoidable changes to his original plan were brought on by the coronavirus pandemic.
- A student worked for hours to create a layered, complex statement of purpose for a paper, and planned to keep working at the paper until it was turned in on time.
- In a flash of inspiration, a student decided to wear her prom dress to make a video of herself playing ukulele for an upper-level Arts & Humanities class.
- A student is digging into schoolwork despite finding it extremely challenging to set up a daily routine.
- When deeply upset, a student used learned coping strategies to manage a situation.
- A student used humor to describe how she keeps busy, does her schoolwork, and overcomes multiple long-term life challenges, knowing that each day is an opportunity to live the life she wants.
- Many students talked about upcoming gateways or senior project exhibitions, all of which speak to persistence and grit despite a pandemic that is affecting families everywhere.

This morning, my husband's family learned of a loved one who did not survive her battle with COVID-19. This relative died in the early morning hours, before birds began their calls and before the first light of day. This is a terrible virus, one that steals breath and life. As our students so clearly articulate, there is a lot of uncertainty right now; there are a lot of unknowns. What we can trust, then, lies in what we *do* know to be true. I do know that this relative, who lived her life as an independent, trail-blazing, loving, brave and outspoken woman, would want us to stick

with our work and daily routines, and keep on trying. She would want us to persevere, take in precious fresh air, look around and see what is going well. She would use humor to move us off complaints and harsh criticisms. We could use the life she lived as inspiration to think about how we might live ours, with the sort of bravery, effort and commitment that moves the world forward, not knowing what lies ahead.

There is no “perfect” in life. And there is certainly no perfect way to do school, to survive a pandemic or to go about one’s day. There are mistakes, there are words spoken that we wish we could take back, there are frustrations, arguments, and tears. Doors get slammed and are eventually reopened; people leave for a walk upset and come back refreshed. Staying at home all the time requires a sort of dance, or flow, or whatever you want to call the ways in which we try to read each other, give space when needed and spend time together. We are all doing the best we can, whether that means staying busy all the time or lying on the couch for a while. For some people, social distancing lessens their anxiety. For others, days feel endless and fraught. We all need a bit of grace right now. We all need a little understanding. I suppose the goal is to *keep on keeping on*, whatever that looks like. The goal is to persevere.

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