



Suzanne Walker Buck, Head of School
Parents' Weekend
The Chapel

09/21/2019, 8:30 a.m. EST

Welcome Families. I am so glad to see you this morning. Thank you for making the effort to be here. I know that you all carved time out of busy schedules to join us on campus. The faculty, staff, and your children (even if they are less vocal about it) remain grateful for your presence.

How fun it was to be together last evening! We were blessed with perfect weather and do I admit this, perfect donuts. Oh my gosh were those good. I loved the bluegrass band. According to my husband Johnny, my do-si-dos were more like do-si-don'ts but we had a blast. Thank you for sharing your sense of spirit and fun.

I've now been here for a few months; the best part of this new adventure has been **getting to know your children** and watching us all grow in community. I'm watching your children play sports, learn alongside faculty, eat in the dining hall. I'm listening to them share ideas, articulate thoughts. I am experiencing their connection with peers, with my family, and in our home. Your sons and daughters are forging relationships that will last a lifetime.

In addition to getting to know your children, I've gotten to know this **amazing place** we call our home. I have seen it through two important lenses...

First, through our day families and students. The people who live in this local area have welcomed my family and me with open arms. They've connected us to the community. They have told us where to eat, shop, get a haircut, relax. They have opened my eyes to places ranging from the National Park, to Peace, Love & Little Donuts; to the Farmer's Market; to the cultural gems of Cleveland. Most importantly they have been a presence. They contribute and create the robustness of our community, cheering at games, assisting with events, spreading the good word of Western Reserve Academy.

I've also gotten to view Western Reserve Academy through the lens of our boarders, who create geographic diversity and cultural richness of our community. At WRA, we have

students from 26 states and 25 countries. There is a big window to the world from inside our own house. Reserve feels safe, like a little hamlet. Some people even call it a "bubble." But in fact, we are BIG in the cultures and attitudes we encompass. We are a place emboldened by a diverse array of languages, viewpoints, and perspectives.

I am so grateful for knowing your children, for your trust, for our team of educators and everyone at WRA who makes this such a special place.

I want to share my **foundational ambitions for this year:**

- To always make our collective house, our campus and community, feel like a home for students. Schools are powerful and here at WRA we will transform lives and trajectories.



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- To align our strategic thinking, curricular planning and educational path forward with a deep student and consideration of what is in the best interest of today's learners.
- To engage with communities - locally and globally – and share our resources of time and talent.
- To explore the concept of joy and how it connects people and enriches learning.

I want to expand on this last point just briefly. JOY. When I talk of joy in education, it is not simply about shallow frivolity or having fun. Joy is deep in scope and widely encompassing. There is joy in learning to learn. In being different. In finding yourself. In finding your path to college! In sacrifice. Stepping up.

To me, there is a salient tie between resilience and joy. The two concepts are not the antithesis of each other but rather work in tandem. I believe in hard work, tenacity, and learning to rebound from adversity. Not everything will be easy. Not everything will be fun, but in learning to persevere, utilizing skills, identifying resources, WRA students are taught to seize, practice, and celebrate joy.

Did you know that the most popular undergraduate class taught at Yale University was one regarding happiness? Taught by professor Laurie Santos, perhaps you have seen her TED talks or her online course, Santos speaks to the need to re-contextualize our frame of perspective. An illustration used for this is that of award winners in the Olympics. Believe it or not, it is often the bronze medalist who experiences the greatest joy in the moment of medal presentation. Unlike the gold medalist after whom others are chasing, or the silver medalist who didn't win gold, the bronze medalist is just happy to be on the podium.

This brings us to the second point to which Santos speaks, the importance of practicing gratitude. By recognizing that for which one is grateful, one brings cognition to the emotional experience of joy.

Here at Western Reserve Academy joy is discovered through many a lens. It is recognized, appreciated, and honored. In addition, joy is reflected in your children's growth. It is evidenced in their hard work. It is illustrated in their play.

Thank you for being here. My colleagues and I value you and your partnership. We care deeply for your children and for this community. Thank you for sharing your family and for celebrating this phenomenal school.

I look forward to getting to know you better throughout this weekend, and the year ahead. But now it is time for you to connect with teachers and attend class. I send you off with the same greeting I extend to your children in the mornings. Go! Pioneer in the Classroom. It's a great day to learn! Find joy!



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Thank you!