Welcome to the 2018-2019 School Year!

The Class of 2018 is very much on my mind as they embark upon life after Mount Markham. I am confident that they are well prepared and that they have been exposed to wonderful content, skill development and enrichment opportunities during their education at Mount Markham. Life outcomes are often influenced by the qualities and traits that educators and parents have talked about and modeled throughout our graduates’ lives. Work ethic, moral character, persistence, dependability, tolerance, these are some of the traits that will carry the day for members of the Class of 2018. I wish the members of the Class of 2018 well and I remind each of them that they continue to represent our community and they are always welcome home.

Another issue heavy on my mind this month is attendance. It is not a surprise to any of us to learn that if a student is absent from school, they fall behind. Life happens; our children get sick, doctor appointments are made and time is taken from school. What concerns me is that when patterns of absenteeism begin in pre-school, kindergarten and first grade, they often continue and worsen resulting in negative outcomes such as grade retention and dropping out of school. The research on absenteeism is clear. When a child is chronically absent from school (missing 10 or more days per year) they struggle to remain on grade level in reading and math, are more likely to be retained and are more likely to make the incredibly damaging decision to drop out of school (please see the research at http://www.attendanceworks.org/research/). Attendance at school is incredibly important!

What can we all do to support regular attendance in school? There are so many things that the school has and will continue to do to support strong attendance; however, I want to dedicate time to talking about an important goal established by the Mount Markham Board of Education that supports parents and guardians in their efforts to get their children to school. Specifically, last year, the board added the following goal:

The Mount Markham Central School is committed to community engagement. We recognize the importance and embrace the opportunity to engage with parents, community members and all stakeholders in support of our students and our school district.

To actualize this goal, our schools are focusing their efforts on meaningfully engaging the community in direct efforts to support student success by supporting parent/guardian/community connections to the school district. One practical way that we hope to engage stakeholder groups this year is the “Pathway to Excellence.” The “Pathway to Excellence” is a focused effort to gather feedback and to prioritize improvement opportunities. You can support Mount Markham’s effort to journey a “Pathway to Excellence” by giving us your feedback. The Board of Education has encouraged the development of a survey (see our website www.mmcsd.org) and to invite stakeholder groups to attend board meetings to share. If you would like to be a stakeholder leader, please reach out to pberry@mmcsd.org. In this role, you will help organize a community group to meet with the board.

Why is community engagement important to student attendance? Parents and guardians are our children’s first and forever teachers. We want to work with our parents and guardians to support positive feelings and connections to school. We encourage the belief that education is a critical part of overall health and wellness. We believe that a strong education supports positive life outcomes. We encourage our parents and guardians to encourage their children to become involved in school extracurricular programs; we encourage our parents and guardians to help their children develop regular bedtime and morning routines; be organized for each school day, completing daily reading and homework; we encourage families to schedule medical appointments after school hours, on Saturdays or during school breaks; finally, we encourage parents and guardians to work closely with our school principals, counselors, social workers and nurses to help their children address any anxiousness related to school that they may be experiencing.

Regular attendance at school is important. I hope that each reader will do what they can to encourage and support school children in their family to strive for perfect attendance at school. Thank you for engaging with our schools and our staff to support this every year initiative. Best wishes for a successful school year!