



## **The Unintended Consequences of the Pandemic on Students: Here are Three Ways Schools Can Get Back on Track**

The pandemic years have had negative consequences on the academic and social/emotional learning of students, with long-term effects that must be addressed. Parents now more than ever need to be aware of the normal developmental stages that our children navigate as they grow. Parents should partner with schools to get back on track...research shows us that the substantial absences from face-to-face school learning during the pandemic will indeed have multi-year negative consequences on child development. There is hope, however. Great schools have made adjustments to provide the best chance for students to catch up academically and restore the social and emotional developmental stages we desire for our children. Here are three key areas for attention you should look for in your school's planning.

### **Social/Emotional Learning**

Parents know intuitively what psychologists have researched and documented over the last few decades; kids go through different developmental stages in each year of schooling whether in public or private education. One example shared by Costa Rica International Academy (CRIA) provides a case study of the negative consequences of the worldwide pandemic shutdowns and masking in schools on a child's development. Say your child was enrolled in grade one in the 2019-20 school year, when COVID led to school shutdowns in the second semester all the way into January 2021. We know that in six to eight-year-old children peer acceptance becomes increasingly important; they start to understand how teamwork is beneficial. Boys will tend to play with boys, girls with girls. Sometimes you may see them organize 'boys against the girls' games at recess. In addition, anxiety about attending school tends to increase in this age group in the normal developmental stages even without covid. Many parents may remember back to their own experiences in primary school and recognize this general developmental stage in life. While there is not much research done on the masking of students during the 2021-22 school year, we all know intuitively that not being able to see peers' facial expressions must have had a deleterious effect on the normal development processes as well.



CRIA recognized this disruption to social/emotional development early on and decided to split classes in many grade levels to have smaller class sizes to better attend to individual student needs for the 2021-22 school year, especially where there were known cases of social/emotional behavioral issues. Then, the unthinkable happens in August 2021 around the world, where schools were compelled to continue mask wearing on account of the pandemic, and thus more



unintended negative consequences on child development. Schools like CRIA anticipated that these developmental disruptions will not be fleeting and would require more discipline monitoring and counseling services. CRIA increased senior administrators as well as counselors on staff with smaller overall class sizes. Teacher duties were increased for monitoring behavior at recesses and lunch times when face-to-face learning resumed. You should expect your school to take similar actions for your child's social/emotional development. Get to know the developmental stages that your child would *normally* go through in school, whether in primary, middle school or high school, and you can be a better partner with school administrators, teachers, and counselors in trying to help your child.

### **Avoiding Chronic Absences**

Educators have known for years that chronic absences, especially in the primary and middle years, have a significant negative effect on student learning. In fact, missing just 15% of school days in a given year has been shown to take years to regain the normally expected yearly progress; a third grader who misses 25% of a school year for example is not expected to get back to their normal academic development path until grade eight. The prolonged pandemic absences from school were so serious that we now have facts coming out about how much students have descended from their normal academic development path. Evidence from around the world is confirming what has been experienced in places like the US where the *Nation's Report Card* results show the negative effects on students across the board. Schools like CRIA will have stringent absentee policies to demonstrate the importance of showing up to school.

The *only* way to get back on track for social/emotional/academic development is to get back on the horse with resilience. As in the example above, we know that there is normal anxiety for kids six-eight about attending school; the loss of school time from the pandemic made this anxiety so much worse for not only this age group but across the grade levels. Having a robust counseling program with one-to-one services as well as teaching groups of students about managing emotions and healthy character traits, such as the venerable *Character Counts* program used around the world at quality schools, should be sought after by parents. Kids need to be taught societal norms that have worked for generations. The Golden Rule, character building and growth mindset behaviors are the best way to avoid anti-social and bullying behaviors from arising in some students. You should seek out a school environment that teaches social and emotional skills like CRIA, and attendance is a must...as the old saying goes, 80% of success is showing up.

*Parents now more than ever need to partner with their school to address these three ways to get back on track. Taking a cooperative approach in building that home-school partnership will avoid the further wasting of precious time needed to attend to the individual needs of your child.*



## Academic Achievement

The fact that the pandemic years would have a negative effect on academic development is now being understood with data from norm-referenced external assessment of students around the world. Now more than ever, parents should seek out school choices that collect data on numeracy and literacy for their child to individualize the learning for the student. You must know your child's academic strengths and areas for attention, as student academic development has been delayed. Schools like CRIA have long-term strategic plans that track data on students—data that is used to improve each student's basic skills. For example, CRIA uses MAP testing for kindergarten to grade eight students, a system that is similar to tracking your child's height by making a pencil mark on the wall over the years. Even if the MAP scores are low, say in language usage, where your child is testing in the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile worldwide, do not blame the test! Parents and teachers should look closely at areas of deficiency as we emerge from the pandemic disruptions to learning. The external tests are *conveying underlying issues*; the test is not the *cause* of your child's deficits. You may be surprised at how many private schools and districts are downplaying their external exams results, and even lowering or eliminating academic standards for success, focusing rather on academically lagging identity groups that are thought to be systemically victimized. Those schools are scapegoating the tests. This is a fixed mindset rather than a growth mindset. Many parents know the old saying 'don't kill the messenger'; this abandonment of external testing is unfortunately happening at too many schools, right up to many universities that have dropped SAT/ACT test scores for admittance. As a parent, don't accept lower standards as an answer for getting your child's academic development back on track to reach their potential.

Parents now more than ever need to partner with their school to address these three ways to get back on track. Taking a cooperative approach in building that home-school partnership will avoid the further wasting of precious time needed to attend to the individual needs of your child. The best approach for parents is to trust your child's educators and verify that your child's social/emotional/academic needs are being met. If you find that your child's needs are not being met, parents should do everything in their power to avoid school programs that are falling short. There's simply no more time that can be squandered on experimental theories and other disruptions to this generation's learning experience. Since the pandemic, parents are voting with their feet and seeking out more traditional schools with exceptional track records that attend to these three attributes of great schools. CRIA is one such school; since the pandemic low, enrollment has doubled in size with students transferring from other Costa Rican schools as well 24 nations from around the world. Ensure that your child, too, has every opportunity for success in their post-pandemic education.