

*Awake or asleep in a grass hut,  
I pray to bring others across before myself.*  
道元禪師 Dogen, 1200-1253

## Why We Will Open

The many reasons *not* to open our school doors:

- No one will support our efforts financially because we are a school for the poor, and right now people are only looking out for themselves.
- The pandemic has cast such a pall that no teachers will wish to be here.
- It is, in fact, just too dangerous given the persistent physical risk.
- It is too expensive to support the smaller class size called for.
- No parents will want to send their children.

These were all reasons not to open our school – back in 1992. At our founding, the pandemic was one of internecine violence and a congruent opioid despair. All brought to a boiling point by a hot and cold war of redlining and lynching that had been simmering for hundreds of years. And an urban body count brightly waxed as the jungle body count waned in Southeast Asia. Given such metrics (back then they called them numbers or statistics), many much wiser than we intoned all the verities bulleted above, and more. But our supporters, those people who loved liberty and justice for all, told us to forge ahead. To build a school so conceived and dedicated. And with that same revolutionary and patriot spirit, we will again open our doors, to the children of essential workers and first responders who held this city together.

In this season of struggle, here are some sacred and scientific reasons **why we will be open - 5 days a week:**

- **Black Lives Matter.**
- Our teachers remain dedicated to the proposition that all children are created equal, so our professionals, true to our noble profession, will show up.
- There has always been risk in revolutionary love. The only greater risk is the cold indifference that perpetuates pandemics, involuntary servitude, and climate change.
- We **can** open. Our founding commitment to small class size for the poor resonates with the pandemic imperative of “social” distancing. And **infection rates are low in our city**. Our larger system now realizes, at least for now, that **smaller class size must be the cost of doing business, even for other people’s children**. That revolutionary belief that all are created equal drove us to build a bright space with air flow for our children here in Spanish Harlem. Isn’t it crazy how in pursuit of justice for every child we can both build an enduring republic and stem a pandemic?
- Our brave and noble families believe in themselves, in us, and educational justice. So they send their dear ones.

And so many of our affluent sisters and brothers will return, their sun-burnished children coming back from cool evening exiles - back into private New York City school houses kitted out with

the latest Covid busting technologies and protocols. Portable sinks will have been added. Toilets that flush and doors that open without a touch of the hand! Prepared meals delivered to classrooms. HVAC systems will have been updated to meet all viral challenges and scrub the air clean of all threats. High-tech cameras will track classroom conversation even better than do scholars distracted by smartphones secreted beneath sanitized desks. And, as ever, *they* will be able to *breathe - breathe freely*.

At the end of the school day for those fortunate children, Black and Brown women with children of their own - with no school house of their own - will pick up white children, feed them, and even tuck them in at night. Once again, they will leave their children at home alone, to care for other people's children downtown. And these women, and all who remained in the face of the pandemic and saved our city, essential workers and first responders, once again find their children getting a substandard education. This time it is further attenuated in a virtual and live staccato delivery of worksheets and soulless, distanced - and distancing learning. Not even able to enter school buildings void of play and light, young **Black Lives** and minds will be relegated to a glowing screen - if there is Wi-Fi connectivity.

The American Academy of Pediatrics is unambiguous about the real harm of not being in school. Meanwhile, as our mayor earnestly paints the streets with words of equality and redemption, and corporations issue heartfelt statements of contrition, few look at these young **Black Lives** and what closed schools will mean for them and their families. I hope those with the greatest power see this educational challenge as a question of basic human rights. As protests fade to distant memory, our collective answer will tell us whether or not **Black Lives** really matter. The future of our nation swings on this response.

And so, too, as a gesture toward a more perfect Union, our little school building in Spanish Harlem will be reopening on the 8th of September. **5 days a week**. We can do so because you and I, dear friend, have always believed that **all** children thrive in smaller class settings and in beautiful buildings filled with light - and open air to *breathe*.

On 103rd Street, our hearts lift as the mercury drops.  
Tell people about our work together!  
I look forward to seeing you here soon.

Love,

Ivan