

“Starting the Parent Support Group has been a 3 year Labor of Love. So first I would like to thank Dr. Dwyer who has been with me every step of the way. Thank you for believing in this group - I couldn't have done it without you. And thank you to the PTO who has agreed with the need for this group and supported it wholeheartedly.

For those of you who don't know me I am Maura Cullen - we have 3 kids - a 5th grader, 3rd grader and Kindergartener.

We moved to PR 6 years ago so we could raise our kids in a community that values family, a strong education, hard work and compassion. We found this community at Roosevelt.

All of us here today have at least 1 thing in common - we want our kids to be respected, included, have friends, be happy.

In a study done 2013 it found 15% of children age 3-17 have a special need. So approximately 112 kids at Roosevelt are differently abled. That means these kids need a little extra support or services. These are kids with ADHD, Autism, speech delay, need help with writing, reading or organizing their day. When you are a parent of a kid with special needs the journey is unclear, uncharted and full of ups and downs. You are sensitive to the challenges your child is facing and this experience can be isolating at times.

I wanted to start this group for 2 main reasons: the obvious one is it will bring parents of kids with differing abilities together. It will be a time to share frustrations and successes, to educate each other, to strategize and learn coping skills and hear about resources for the journey ahead.

But I think equally as important it will be a platform where we can teach the kids at Roosevelt that every child has equal value even if he/she can't run as fast, talk as clearly, write or draw as well as some other kids can.

It is a unique time that our kids are growing up - it is a time of tremendous technological growth so now more than ever I think it's critical that we continue to build human connections. We need to foster kindness, compassion, being a good friend and including all kids.

I would like to conclude with an excerpt that Cubs Manager Theo Epstein gave to the 2017 Yale graduates. I think he nailed the importance of being connected.

One day I will tell Jack (Theo's son) that some players and some of us, go through their careers with their heads down, focused on our craft and our tasks, keeping to ourselves, worrying about our numbers or our grades, pursuing the next objective goal, building our resumes, projecting our individual interests. Other players, or others amongst us, go through our careers with our heads up, as a real part of a team, alert and aware of others, embracing difference, employing empathy, genuinely connecting, putting collective interests ahead of our own. It is a choice.

The former approach, keeping our head down, seems safer and more efficient. And I guess sometimes it is. The latter, connecting, keeping our heads up, allows us to lead and every now and then to be part of something much greater than ourselves. When you come together and connect it is likely to uplift you all.

Here's to our future - a strong, kind Roosevelt community that will set the world on fire."

-Maura Cullen Ali