This time of year has always signalled change. Seniors moving on, every middle schooler anxious about going to the high school the following school year and elementary students excited about being promoted. Change and challenges are not new to school districts. However, this year COVID-19 has everyone thinking about new ways to meet the unprecedented challenges. Every community has been touched by stress, anxiety and unrest. Many communities have been affected by death and illness, some more than others. And, although it may not seem like it right now, I truly believe there is hope and an opportunity for healing in this peculiar mixture. We need to be intentional about how we go about our healing.

Similar to the way a common nighthawk bird roams the skies over treetops, grasslands, and cities flying in graceful loops, looking for insects to uproot, Nyack school community, we have an opportunity to do the same. We can start by roaming over areas in our education system - individual school buildings, practices, procedures, protocols, even our individual selves - in our reflections. Secondly, similar to the nighthawk bird we look for things to uproot – our impediments. Then, definitely we have to include preparing for a changed society, for me this loosely translates to opportunity with intentions. The opportunity to explore and scrutinize without judgment. An opportunity to be innovative, creative, and imaginative and clearly an opportunity to envision what we can become. The opportunity to illustrate that we matter.

In the book We want to do More than Survive; Abolitionist Teaching at the Pursuit of Educational Freedom, author Bettina L. Love states that “mattering is civics because it is the quest for humanity”. Love goes on to clarify that her use of the word civics. She states it is “not narrowly defined as voting, paying taxes,” etc., but rather “something much deeper”. The word ‘civic,’ Love states, refers to the “practice of abolitionist teaching rooted in the internal desire we all have.” The internal desire for “freedom, joy, and restoring humanity, not just rules.” The internal desire to matter, to ourselves, our community, our family and our country, with the profound understanding that we must “demand the impossible”....

I believe that mattering refers to the question, “What can we become?” We could use this opportunity with intent and prepare to strive for the impossible. School community, our next steps must include mattering. With mattering at the forefront, we can become a collective that includes ideas like:

It matters that all students feel as though they belong.

It matters if we use the exploration of root causes in our efforts to problem solve.

It matters if our problem solving is an action; an action that entails first accepting the truth—that not everyone who isn’t thriving isn’t trying. Then, by helping students and families that have the least access to resources and restricted access to opportunities.

It matters that everyone is confident in our believe that we are striving to always become better.

It matters when we are not hindered by our mistakes but use them as learning and growth opportunities.

It matters that we truly feel in our hearts and minds that all children are our children.

It matters that transparency is a place where the voice of the oppressed and dissatisfied students are not afraid to express how we can help them.

It matters that when a need arises, the entire community rushes in- willingly and enthusiastically- to be partners in creating a realistic, viable solution because they trust us.

It matters that when there is a place that’s working on a goal to achieve racial equity, the conversations are transparent and result in learning and growing, and not seen as opinions.

It matters that the Nyack School District becomes a place that is considered one of the most extraordinary role model districts in history; not only in the county of Rockland, but for the entire world. It matters that the slogan ‘Nyack Strong!’ represents the sentiments that are felt by those who have and are able to manage, as well as felt by those who are lacking in the basic of resources.

We have an opportunity here, amid all the uncertainty that surrounds us, to acknowledge that what we are going to do matters. It matters!