



## BACK TO SCHOOL: BACK TO NORMAL!

Mario J. Paredes

9/2/2022

Every year, when summer ends with these first days of September, after we have celebrated "Labor Day," we begin a new school year in the United States of America, another year of work and dreams aimed toward the greater and better education of our children and young people.

The annual beginning of school and academic activities marks the right time to consider and reconsider the importance and current state of education in our Nation. Beyond the primary, non-transferable and irreplaceable educational effort that must happen within each family, every human community ensures, through an academic process of teaching and learning, the indispensable transmission of values, knowledge and training in the intellectual, moral, social and emotional dimensions of human beings, for each respective society and cultural environment.

Academic education is a fundamental pillar in the construction of every society in its need for coexistence and its ideals of progress. Just as all development and progress in education is commendable, all stagnation in the essential task of educating new generations yields only social backwardness and frustration.

For all these reasons, it is so important that societies and the government invest great care into the comprehensive school care of all children and young people, but especially of the child and youth

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populations at the greatest social risks, those who are most impoverished, most vulnerable, and who have fewer opportunities to access the benefits of school education and their academic, technical and scientific advances.

In this regard, I think of the importance of the federal, state, and municipal investments in education that must be given to schoolchildren and students of minority population groups.

Similarly, school education, at its primary, secondary and university levels, must be a comprehensive task: a task and purpose that include the development of all dimensions of the human being (historical, social, biological, psychological, sexual, religious, cultural, artistic, playful, political, economic, etc.) because, the extent of a person's, and a society's, happiness and development is directly proportional to the greater sum of all its dimensions.

SOMOS Community Care, the organization where I work, brings together over 2,500 doctors who come from different countries, but are united and organized in a network of health professionals who share a common purpose: to provide better and broader medical care to Medicaid patients in New York City (the Bronx, Queens, Manhattan and Brooklyn), in their respective neighborhoods, cultures and languages.

With this vision, and recognizing the importance of education and its recipients, the City of New York and the SOMOS Community Care Organization have reached an inter-institutional agreement through which SOMOS will advance, for this next return to school, a preventative school health campaign against COVID-19 called BACK TO SCHOOL – BACK TO NORMALITY. SOMOS will lead this campaign that calls for the widest possible participation of all those committed to and responsible for education in school environments: parents, guardians, teachers, students, etc.

Now that COVID-19 vaccines are available to anyone, starting at 6 months of age, SOMOS will ask doctors in its network to urge parents and/or guardians of students to ensure that their children and all members of their household receive their routine vaccinations, in addition to COVID-19 vaccines and boosters, to keep them healthy and safe throughout the school year.

As the main tool of this campaign, we have created the website: BACK TO SCHOOL, which will serve as an information center where parents can obtain guidance in English, Spanish and Chinese.



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SOMOS wants to make sure checkups and vaccinations are on the back-to-school checklist for all students. To do this, on the website mentioned above, parents/guardians may:

- Find a pediatrician and/or a doctor from SOMOS Community Care.
- Download student health forms for their child or adolescent.
- Schedule COVID-19 vaccination appointments.
- Find health advice for their children and/or dependents.
- Get their child's list of school supplies.

Let's return safely and securely to classes with SOMOS! Let's go back to school! Let's get back to normal, and with good health!

*Mario J. Paredes is CEO of SOMOS Community Care, a network of 2,500 independent physicians — mostly primary care physicians — who care for nearly one million of New York City's most vulnerable Medicaid patients.*