

Churchville-Chili teachers present parade for pupils

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Schools are closed but a group of elementary teachers showed they're full of class.

Learning has moved online, so Churchville-Chili educators used a different type of Zoom to connect with their students on Sunday. They hopped in their cars and paraded through the district to say hi to the community.

The idea began with a Facebook post from Chestnut Ridge first-grade teacher Suzanne Cimino, who was missing her kids while schools are shut down to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus. Teachers cleared it with Superintendent Lori Orologio and agreed to assemble at CRS at 3:45 p.m. The parking lot was full with 40 vehicles.

"It spread like wildfire," said Principal Kim Hale.

Calculating a route to cruise past every home is tricky, so administrators reached out to the town expert: Santa Claus. The Chili Fire Department led the cavalcade through the streets, using the path it takes for its annual holiday tradition.

"The world needs a little positivity right now," Cimino said. "We've been struggling with not being able to give hugs goodbye or say goodbye to our children. We're thinking about

"It was so nice to hear them scream your name and see the excitement on their faces."

The teachers get extra credit for decorating their cars and adorning them with signs and balloons. Some teachers' pets — the domesticated kind — attended.

"A bunch of them brought their dogs, who were hanging out the windows. It was really cute," said Kelly Lamb, the district PTO secretary who has two sons at CRS. "The kids loved it."

"I was glad I had sunglasses on because I had tears in my eyes."

Parents got word of the plan, and hundreds of families lined up outside their homes to wave to the parade. Kids chalked sidewalk art on their driveways, sounded noisemakers and scribbled handmade "thank you" banners. A little girl, dressed in Churchville-Chili orange and black with pom-poms, performed cartwheels for the procession.

Soon it was clear that the children wouldn't be able to avoid phys ed.

"Their gym teacher (Greg Kincaid) stopped his truck in front our house and made my boys do pushups. He said 'Stop and give me 10,'" Lamb said, laughing. "I've been super impressed with how teachers have handled everything online, and seeing them in person made a huge difference. The kids were beyond excited to have that connection, even if was for a couple of minutes."

"There were a lot of tears of happiness," said Hale, who choked up remembering the moment. "I think everybody needed it." The teachers set ground rules to follow social distancing. The event wrapped up an hour before Gov. Andrew Cuomo's "New York on Pause" executive order went into effect Sunday at 8 p.m.

Math and science took a back seat, and teachers hopped in the front seat. The evening's lesson plan was focused on lifting spirits and school spirit.

Take a scroll through your social media feeds and peppered between photos of empty shelves and social distancing recommendations you'll find parents professing their gratitude for the work teachers do every day.

We can all take a page out of that book.

A+, teachers, and thanks for being you.

Full disclosure: Staff writer Ryan Miller went to Chestnut Ridge School in the '90s. He met his future wife there and was on the safety patrol, but no one took him seriously when he told them to slow down.

them and caring about them beyond the work we're expecting them to do.”

The kids gave plenty back to the teachers.

One family lives on a main road and cheered on the parade each time it passed. The dad jokingly offered his sons back to the teachers.

The educators' message back to families was so clear it was penned on the sides of their vehicles: we miss you, too.