

## PhillyKinder Moving Forward in 2020

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Back on May 19, 2020, after two months of being home 24/7 and of helping my daughter with online school, I sat down at my computer and started a new Word document. My intent was to write an article that would be appropriate for the *Staatsbote*. I didn't know if I would ever submit the article for consideration, but I was upset, and I felt that writing the article would be a stress-reliever. The original title of my article was "HOW COVID-19 HAS DISRUPTED MY BILINGUAL HOME". I was angry at how our new situation had disrupted my perfect plan of my daughter learning French and English at school, while I concentrated on her German at home. All of a sudden, I was her French teacher and her English teacher, in addition to continuing my full-time job, and these duties left me little time or energy to do anything with my daughter in German. While my husband was working from home, his work hours only increased in the first few months of the lockdown, so my daughter wasn't getting much German from him either. Although I was distressed at the situation, I quickly abandoned my article. I figured with all the fear, anger, worry, and hurt we were all experiencing, my complaint about the disruption of our bilingual routine seemed rather insignificant.

Fortunately, not long after the false start with my article, it was time to get back to business with PhillyKinder. In May, the founding President of PhillyKinder Maria Sturm stepped aside, and I was elected the new President of the PhillyKinder

Board of Directors. While I was excited about my new role, taking the reins of an organization during a pandemic is intimidating to say the least. In May and June it seemed nearly impossible to plan for anything, but our fearless Administrative Team and our dedicated Board of Directors got to work. After a quick switch to online learning in late March, we decided to offer an online 6-week summer class, something we had never offered before. We reasoned that a lot of our community members, who would usually go to Germany in the summer, would be staying put in Philadelphia and would be interested in a program to help them keep up their children's German language skills. We also figured that a well-planned course that was designed for online learning would be good practice for our teachers and our organization, in case we had to go fully online in the fall. Our summer offering was a success, but the bad news kept coming. We would not be able to offer our Sommerlager camp or our fall in-person course offering.

While it was already increasingly clear that we would have to offer most of our classes online, we had hoped to have an in-person offering for our youngest children. Alas, in-person instruction was not meant to be for the rest of 2020. At that point our biggest concern was how could we keep our community together, while we were forced to go online? We wanted not only to offer classes in German but also to lend support to all our families. We were prepared to offer our online classes, but we wanted to find ways for our families to get together in small groups (taking COVID precautions, of course!). We also spent a lot of time wondering if our families would sign their children up for our online class, when their children would

already be spending hours a day online for their regular school. Would we be able to keep our community together? Would PhillyKinder be able to weather the COVID storm?

I am pleased to report that our families showed up big! While our online program did not work for all of our students from last year, we were able to retain the majority of our students. We even have new students that live too far away to attend our Thursday classes and former students that had moved out of state rejoining us, thanks to the magic of Zoom! The PhillyKinder teachers have done an amazing job keeping all of our children engaged online; we are so grateful for their efforts!

In addition to our course offerings, we had been able to organize several small get-togethers. Our monthly *Kaffeeklatsch* has morphed into a *Spielplatztreffen*, our *Märchenstunde* at the GSP has returned, and we hosted a *Buchverkauf* in October at our Overbrook location.

While we wish we could get back to our regular in-person Thursday classes in Overbrook and Tuesday classes in Center City, we are doing the best that we can for now. Although our Administrative Team and our Board continue to worry about whether or not we are doing enough for our community, we need to remember that we are doing our best under extraordinary circumstances, just like everyone else around the globe.

We hope that the next school year will be somewhat back-to-normal, but regardless of the what the future holds, we at PhillyKinder will be there for our

families, and we have seen that our families will be there for us!



My family's bilingual routine has changed as a result of the pandemic, but we have found a new balance that we can live with. My husband's schedule has become less demanding in the past few months, so after I do homework with my daughter in French and in English, she plays either soccer or video games with her father, while speaking in German. I am sometimes disappointed that my German connection with my daughter has diminished this year, but I have to remember what I tell everyone else. "We shouldn't be so hard on ourselves, as we are all doing the best that we can!"

In closing, I would like to thank all of our PhillyKinder families for their support over the years. PhillyKinder is a great organization because of you! I would also like to thank the German Society of Pennsylvania for helping us get the Center City *Märchenstunde* going again. We appreciate the collaboration, as it is helping us to keep our community together!