"When children live in poverty, their education is affected. Even if one’s education is good, it may not help a child in poverty since that child must worry about so many things outside education.”

Thea, a mother of four sons and a grandmother to grandchildren, is from Florida and is heavily involved in her grandchildren’s education. Thea, like several other parents and grandparents, has looked at the COVID-19 pandemic through multiple lenses. For one, she saw the COVID-19 pandemic as a boon to her relationship with her husband, who worked 60 miles from home before stay-at-home orders were enacted; now, they get to spend more time together. On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic was challenging for several of her grandchildren, including her granddaughter, who struggled to reintegrate into social settings after months of isolation.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Thea has reflected on the concept of the whole child, defining ‘focusing on the whole child’ as focusing on the well-being of the child that goes beyond the classroom. She notes that while a good education is helpful to many, it may only provide marginal benefits to those living in poverty and/or a difficult environment. Furthermore, she has pushed for the need to have more life skills training in schools. When growing up, her school devoted significant time and resources to teaching students life skills, including balancing a checkbook.

Thinking about education reform, Thea pushes for an entry into a new normal, one in which schools utilize the gains they have made from the COVID-19 pandemic, place children into classroom settings based on how they learn and ensure that teachers never have to use their own money to invest in supplies for the classroom.