

School District of Ashland

ERIK T. OLSON, *Superintendent*
BONNIE L. STEGMANN, *Business Manager*

AMANDA J. POPOVICH, *Director of Student Learning*
DANIELLE E. MIKULA, *Director of Student Services*

May 14, 2020

Wisconsin State Capitol
Janet Bewley, Senator
P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senator Bewley:

I hope this letter finds you, your family, and your staff well. While none of us could have predicted the challenges that would be presented to our nation's schools are a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, I am pleased to provide you with this update about the School District of Ashland's efforts to meet the needs of our students.

Considering the geographic diversity of our district, which ranges from students who live in town to those who live in remote areas, and the concentrations of poverty in our district, the needs of our students are very diverse.

Consider this:

- The poverty rate of our students is near 70%. Many of these students depend on the meals provided at school.
- Only 78% of our students have reliable broadband access to the internet.
- Some of our students have significant disabilities that require a great deal of support.

As a school district, we are focused on all of our students' needs, including their most basic. As we know that many of our students depend on the district for nutritious meals, we are proud to have served more than 129,860 meals in eight weeks and we will continue to do so going forward.

At the same time, our teachers are providing high-quality instruction to students and communicating nearly daily with their families. Since our schools were closed as a result of the pandemic, I have heard story after story of heroic efforts of our staff in meeting our student's needs, including educators who have transformed their living spaces to mimic their classrooms, delivering items to students homes who do not have internet access and doing everything within their power to ensure that school continues as normally as possible in our district.

Since the shutdown, we have been proud to work with the Bad River Tribal Program, Mashkiizibii Youth Services, to ensure materials and services are provided to students and grateful to assist Ashland's Teacher's Union Local 1275 to distribute over 800 books to students.

Many of our students who had previously received mental health therapies and supports within the building are now accessing therapy through tele-services. We have reached over 200 families of students with special education services to create plans to support virtual education. We have found that a number of our students with disabilities struggle significantly with accessing and engaging in meaningful learning online. Our teachers continue to use innovative and creative engagement strategies that work well for some. The students we are unable to reach weigh heavily on our minds and hearts each day.

We have taken an all hands on deck approach to all of the work in our district with educational assistants working to print packets for delivery to students and working remotely to complete required components like reporting for state and federal, audits, and budgeting requirements. In addition, our facilities staff are using this opportunity to tackle maintenance projects such as painting large portions of the schools, retrofitting gymnasium lighting to more efficient LED options.

The School District of Ashland does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability or age in admission, treatment, or access to any of its programs or activities.

DISTRICT OFFICE • 2000 BEASER AVENUE • ASHLAND, WISCONSIN 54806 • 715-682-7080 • FAX: 715-682-7097

While we are challenged by our geography, lack of broadband connections, the significant needs of our students, and the inability to know when we will get back to normal, the School District of Ashland remains "Oredocker Strong" in our resolve to meet the needs of our students and our communities.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss our efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Erik T. Olson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "E" and "O".

Erik T. Olson
Superintendent