



SCHOOL DISTRICT OF BARABOO

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May 26, 2020

Dear Representative,

We hope this letter finds you, your family, and your colleagues well and in good health. The School District of Baraboo would like to take this opportunity to provide an update as we address the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our District made the difficult decision to close our schools with the last day of instruction on Friday, March 13th. Prior to that date and since that time, our District Leadership Team meets daily to respond to the ever-evolving developments and guidance to best support our students, families, and community during these unprecedented times. Our efforts to date have resulted in teachers and staff shifting practices to provide remote learning, delivering online social-emotional assistance, and ensuring over 40,000 meals to students in need. The School District of Baraboo is still in session through June 5th, launching a virtual summer school program for the first time to elementary students, and beginning preparations for an uncertain start to the 2020-2021 school year.

Challenges are something that every school district faces. The School District of Baraboo stands ready to respond to this crisis and collaborate with our community. We are driven to do everything we can to overcome obstacles in meeting the needs of our individual students and families. When this global pandemic started and we pursued the idea of remote learning, one of the biggest barriers we faced was how to get a device into the hands of all of our students and guarantee internet access. In a survey to our families, despite the deployment of district equipment, we learned that 125 families still had no device for remote learning and 70 families did not have access to the internet. We quickly reallocated resources to purchase items such as hotspots for families to use. Our educators use engagement forms to monitor student learning and connect with families who indicate struggles to continuously lend a helping hand.

Remote learning presents other challenges, such as how to best support the needs of our students who are English Learners and those that receive specially designed instructional services. These students require targeted skill instruction from experts to keep pace with their peers. We recognize that many parents/guardians continued to work during the “Stay-at-Home” order as essential workers. Others are not equipped to manage the specialized instruction needed for their child. These students with the greatest need are tasked with accessing and engaging in learning activities without those specialized supports, creating an even larger gap in learning opportunity. Moving forward, we will develop and offer compensatory services for these students.

As a district, we are proud of our outstanding educators and the commitment to serve all students. During this pandemic, we learned new ways to collaborate with each other and our scholars that will continue to increase accessibility and engagement in the future. We embraced different technology tools

that will undoubtedly infiltrate our traditional teaching and learning spaces when we can return to a normal school structure. Due to limited instructional opportunities with our students, we have also been forced to take a critical look at our curriculum and prioritize those skills that will truly ensure our learners to be career, college, and life ready. Whenever school buildings can reopen, we will be even more prepared to assist our students and build toward a better future.

Another challenge is the food insecurities experienced by many of our community members and children. The School District of Baraboo Food Service personnel coordinated efforts with our two school social workers and District Equity Facilitator to address the basic needs of our students. With just under 50 percent of the student population considered to be economically disadvantaged, many families entrust the district with supporting the nutritional needs of their students throughout the school year. Upon initial school closure notices, it was immediately recognized that daily schedules, transportation barriers, and other circumstances unique to the pandemic may prohibit students from utilizing traditional meal pick-up locations. The District committed to delivering meals to families expressing need until pick-up locations could be intentionally expanded to maximize student reach. The Baraboo High School food pantry arranged for bi-weekly grocery delivery to families expressing need, in coordination with various community agencies to provide families continuity in their access to food.

As educators, we are most concerned with the social-emotional and mental health of our students during this time. We hear that domestic abuse is up 40% in our region. We know that we have students who are unable to escape traumatic experiences occurring in their homes. Collectively, we all are experiencing trauma due to the uncertainties of this pandemic. Trauma will translate into more significant needs when we are able to return to school together. In preparation, our team is determining social-emotional learning needs, allocating time in future schedules, and prepping lessons to build resilience in all of us.

As we move forward, we are eager to join you in navigating this uncharted future. Please know that we welcome your calls or emails to best explain our work and answer any questions you may have.

Always Onward,

Dr. Lori M. Mueller

District Administrator

School District of Baraboo