

May 10, 2020

Dear Representative Loudenbeck, Representative August, and Senator Nass,

Hello. As the District Administrator, I feel it is important that I share how the Delavan-Darien School District is fairing during the COVID-19 crisis. Like every educational institute, we are trying our best. We have kept 100% of our staff employed, paid and working during this crisis, which I feel is essential to our economy and their families.

In the April 23, 2020 [edition](#) of the MyWalworthCounty.com online news feed, DDSD has been ahead of the curve. In mid-February, we started to have discussions and planning meetings with staff regarding the potential impact of the pandemic and what it would mean for us as educators. Since March 13th when Governor Evers announced the first Safer at Home order, we have been educating children virtually. We were ready to go, and most students have been engaged in their education from their homes.

I want to stress the word most. One of our challenges is the internet. About ten percent of our families did not have access to the internet based on where they lived (i.e. wrong side of highway, too rural, or just couldn't afford). Furthermore, I am hearing that many are now having to make a choice between food on the table or internet. This inequity makes reaching our youth and their families extremely challenging. With that being said, we continue to reach out, send paper packages via Dousman Transportation, and staff contacting students and their families on the phone. Overall, I believe we are engaging about 75% of our youth; which to be honest, is disheartening as the other 25% typically are the most at-risk or students who need greater support.

The Delavan-Darien staff are working extraordinarily hard to reach, educate, and support every child and their family. They have embraced Zoom meetings, Google Meet, DOJO, Google Classroom, and Schoology to name a few of the online platforms. In addition, many of our support staff and teachers are making trips to drop off and pick up work from students. Furthermore, our food service company, Taher, as well as support staff continue to feed children daily. We have two pick-up spots, Darien Elementary and our High School, where we offer daily pick up including weekend meals that are provided on Fridays. As you may recall, we are about 65% free and reduced, so providing this service is essential for our community. On the average, we are serving 800 meals per day and over 2000 meals on Fridays.

As the District Administrator, I am "drinking from the firehose" on information from DPI, WASDA, SAA, WASB, attorneys, and other local Superintendents. We are all trying to understand how to maneuver, make solid decisions and provide information to our communities. Currently, I am charged with trying to create a budget with unknown numbers from the state, decide on a graduation experience for our Seniors, decide on summer school without knowing funding and how we can run it, and plan for the 2020-2021 school year. One of these in isolation is challenging, but putting them all together is daunting. Like you, people are looking to me for answers to which I say, we must plan...but be fluid.

I can tell you, I have learned a lot in this experience. I have learned in the two-years since I took over as District Administrator the importance of fiscal responsibility and how essential it is for the Delavan-Darien School District. The importance of transparency with the community and staff to create trust. I have also learned the significance of planning.

We currently are working towards developing a plan for the 2020-2021 school year. With so many unknowns on where we will be in respect to the Badger Bounce Back, we are creating various scenarios. I know the Wisconsin Health Department, as per my call with Jeanne Ayers our State Health Officer on Friday, May 8th, does not have the answers and like all of us is trying her best. In the coming month, I will be working with my staff to increase our success in blending online and in-person learning for next year. Our preparation for next year will hopefully put our families at ease knowing that DDS is again ahead of the curve. In addition, knowing that funding could be an issue for school districts for the 2020-2021 school year, I am taking the small savings (transportation, cancellation of spring sports, and substitute costs) and pre-ordering supplies for next year.

I welcome a conversation with you regarding how DDS can partner with our legislatures on what we may need as an educational institute. I will not be asking for answers around funding, as I understand we are all trying our best. Instead, I want you to understand how other decisions or statutes may negatively impact education during these extreme circumstances such as the Open Enrollment policy and Alternative Enrollment options. Both of these are unfair to educational institutes that do not currently offer a Virtual School. For the past six months, I have been working with members from the Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative and CESAs to understand how to bring a Virtual School to Delavan-Darien. Since early February, they have been backlogged.

My biggest concern is for the Fall. Teacher contracts have been offered (with no salary increases for the 2020-2021 school year due to the lack of uncertainty), yet I have no idea what school will look like under this COVID-19 crisis. Families may choose to look to institutes that fit under the guise of a Virtual School. All the while, we are purchasing devices for every child and preparing to bring to fruition a blended/online model as outlined [here](#) by DPI.

I share all this with you so you understand what we are doing. I want you to understand how the Delavan-Darien School District is operating, planning, and praying to make it out of this crisis. I ask you to email me back so we can establish a day and time to talk. I welcome an honest conversation knowing we are all here for our fellow Wisconsinites.

Respectfully,

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