



May 11, 2020

Representative John Nygren
State Capitol
PO Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Representative Nygren,

I hope this letter finds you, your family, and your colleagues well. I recently read your May 8 edition of *Nygren's Notes*. Thank you for your statement of interest to work "Together (so) we can come up with a Wisconsin plan that protects our most vulnerable, while at the same time ensuring we prevent unnecessary financial ruin." Clearly, this has been a challenging time for leaders at all levels - and I appreciate the fact that you are also reaching out through your *COVID-19 Tele-Town Hall* events to hear the views of your constituents. With this in mind, please allow me to provide an update from the Howard-Suamico School District as we address the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Beginning in mid-March, we convened a group of 20 school district thought leaders who meet weekly as part of our **COVID-19 Containment Response Team**. The following statement serves as a beacon in helping us stay focussed on the most important work:

We will collaborate, acquire just-in-time information, and adjust quickly to provide stakeholders with clear, concise, consistent, and relevant information to take informed personal and professional action.

2. As a result of infrastructure investments that date back to 2010, we are fortunate to have the capacity to deliver a digital at-home learning experience for our 6,000 students. Partnering with parents, our 400+ teachers have worked quickly - and tirelessly - to mobilize and deliver learning experiences using our online platform for all K-12 learners:
 - a. HSSD Data/Analytics for Virtual Learning (See appendix for more data)
 - i. All students in grades K-12 have access to a district-issued iPad or MacBook Air device. A repair process has been established to facilitate a touch-free exchange of equipment and a technology support system was set up for parents and students.

- ii. HSSD has deployed 68 Kajeet filtered hotspots to families without access. Others have benefited from the extension of free access by internet providers like Spectrum.
 - iii. HSSD students engage in virtual learning through our Learning Management System of Schoology in Grades 5-12 and our K-4 students access content through SeeSaw.
 - iv. All HSSD teaching staff, many instructional assistants (including all special ed), and many office and support staff employees have access to a district laptop. This ensures a common experience among staff and students.
 - v. Google Analytics from the last 30 days (April 10 - May 9, 2020)
 - 14,147+8,443 (148%) Video Hangouts
 - 133,496 +16,460 (14%) Files added
 - 1.9 M+181,942 (10%) Total Emails
 - vi. File sharing activity in last 30 days in Google Drive
 - 29,754 External shares
 - 179,628 Internal shares
3. We have accessed local, state and national research and resources to develop a digital learning plan that balances the academic learning needs (including the 780 who qualify for special education services) with the social and emotional needs of all students.
 4. Families in our 4K program continue to receive activities and resources to maintain learning momentum.
 5. While nothing compares to the relational benefits and quality of experience offered by in-person learning, I am proud to share that 88% of K-12 parents recently reported their students have been productive on the assigned work.
 6. Approximately twenty-percent, or 1,200 of our students, qualify for free and reduced lunches. As unemployment escalates in one of our nation's hardest hit Covid-19 counties (i.e. Brown County), this number is estimated to increase. In response, we have deployed our highly dedicated School Nutrition personnel to seven remote food pick-up sites to provide breakfast and lunch meals for our children. In the month of April we served almost **45,000** meals and presently we are averaging 2,200 meals issued per day during scheduled pick-up dates.
 7. To support our most vulnerable families, *The Giving Tree Food Pantry* (organized and led by a group of mainly HSSD employees) in partnership with our Education Foundation hosted its first virtual auction to raise funds for food, utilities and basic hygiene supplies. Remarkably, our community responded by donating approximately \$100,000; i.e. the

annual amount necessary to support the local needs of our families in need as we head into the uncertainty of 2020-21.

8. Our social workers are partnering with our staff to deliver food and basic supplies to 61 of our families who are not able to even get to our food pick up sites due to illness, lack of transportation, etc.
9. Communication with our 6,000 students, 3,000+ families and 600 full-time staff has been a top priority. A website landing page devoted singularly to COVID-19 communications is updated almost daily to keep stakeholders apprised of latest developments. Please see the extent of our communications at www.hssdschools.org . I also send a weekly Monday video followed by a Thursday email with tactical details. The video is averaging 10,000 views per week on Facebook.
10. After adopting a new virtual meeting policy, our Board of Education continues to provide high impact governance and leadership. Correspondingly, administration is providing routine COVID-19 response updates at each Board meeting.
11. To help infuse the economy with much-needed spending, we have kept all of our employees whole with respect to salaries and benefits, maintained contracts with third-party vendors, and moved forward with facility and maintenance projects that had been planned and scheduled. We believe our partnership in this area is an important part of economic recovery.
12. As a board member of the local Howard-Suamico Business Professional Association (HSBPA), I have offered school district services to local business leaders - and actively promoted shopping local in my written and video communications to families and community members.
13. Our students and staff have made masks, donated supplies, and helped organize and lead in partnership with Schreiber Foods, the Green Bay Packers, etc. an initiative to combat the crisis of confidence being felt by many. Please check out and support the **#KeepOnWI** initiative!

Despite our best efforts, there have been disappointments, frustrations and setbacks. While I fully realize that these pale in comparison to the loss of life, the cancellation of spring sports, dances, concerts, and commencement are just a few annual rights of passage that have left a void in our learning community. As we look to the future, the learning loss for some of our most vulnerable students is of grave concern.

Despite lingering uncertainty, we are preparing for a virtual July summer school programming and exploring ways to integrate students safely back to school next fall...

I close with a letter recently sent to me by one of our families. It underscores the tremendous efforts of our entire team during this time of trial and challenge:

I just wanted to send you a note and tell you how much I appreciate you and all you've done these past few weeks. We have three daughters (4th grade at Forest Glen, 8th grade at Bay View and Sophomore at Bay Port). They have each adjusted to digital learning in their own way, including tears, anger and confusion. I have to say that while these are trying times, you and the HSSD staff have worked so hard to make digital learning a success. This is not normal classroom teaching and the teachers have been able to adapt and adjust to the new way of learning. They've also done an amazing job being available for the girls when they've had questions. Not only are they trying to keep things in order at their own homes and deal with their personal feelings about all of this but they find time to respond quickly and are always willing to help. That is so appreciated!! What is really amazing is that not only are they there for academic help but they have made sure to check on the girls' emotional/mental well being too. I can't tell you how much that means as well. It's so hard for the kids to adapt to the changes of digital learning and now no more in class school but then throw in a virus/pandemic and that's just scary. I really appreciate that they are taking the time and addressing that as well.

Thank you for everything you've done. I know the time and energy you put into this ever changing situation is probably exhausting and challenging. I just wanted to say thank you and it doesn't go unnoticed!

-Jason and Tara O'Leary, April 20, 2020

I would be happy to share additional information in the future if interested. We also look forward to the possibility of having you meet with our Board of Education in June for our annual *Community Conversation* event.

As we move forward, I welcome your calls or emails so that I can explain our work and answer any questions you may have. I will also provide you with additional updates. Certainly, much work remains as we finish the school year, begin the summer school session, and prepare for the start of the new school year this fall.

With Unity,

Damian LaCroix

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Appendix: Schoology Analytics from the last 30 days (April 10 - May 10, 2020)

Schoology Analytics from the last 30 days (April 10 - May 9, 2020)

Engagement of students, staff, administration and parents is also reflected in Schoology our Learning Management System (LMS) This data represents the engagement of students accessing content, teachers posting and creating course materials, assessments, and file submissions.

Apr 10, 2020 to May 9, 2020

