



LINN J4 SCHOOL DISTRICT
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Allyssa Andersen, District Administrator

May 8, 2020

Dear Representative August,

I hope this letter finds you and those around you safe and healthy. I would like to provide you with an update from the Linn J4 School District as we address the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As I reflect on the last two months, it seems like just yesterday that I was in my office reading about states who were closing schools due to the virus. So many thoughts ran through my head about what this would mean for our students, families, and teachers if we were to find ourselves closed. And then, it was the week that began a full moon and ended on Friday the 13th. It is a long-standing joke in the education committee that the two events can cause the kids to get crazy. Little did we know how crazy it would get!

Over that weekend, I made plans and changed them so many times. I collaborated with neighboring schools and spoke with our bus company. It was decided. The students would not return on Monday, March 16.

Our staff quickly sprang into action. We met that Monday and created a plan for how to roll out distance learning for our students. On Tuesday, families came to pick up devices and materials. On Wednesday, we began to Zoom, and use Google Classroom, email, and digital platforms exclusively. Our staff worked together to figure out how to alternatively teach our students in about twenty-four hours. I could not be more proud of their efforts. They are working as hard as ever to take care of our students. They work from the morning into the evening, depending on when the kids are available. Our special education teacher even travels to kids' driveways to teach them from a social distance. Learning is very much alive for our district!

We are constantly checking in with students and families. We have found WiFi hotspots for them (no easy task, I can tell you!) and have worked with a neighboring district who supplies our lunches to make sure kids can still eat. Families seem to be doing alright, but we still worry about them so much.

A big challenge with distance learning is that we are a rural district and not every family has a decent internet connection. We had devices for them to take home, so the internet was all that was needed. We are grateful that the families are trying their best to stay connected, but it is evident that the kids who do not have as much, struggle the most to finish work and attend virtual class time.

Another challenge we are learning about is how families are handling being at home with distance learning. We have found that the families who were struggling before the closure are continuing to struggle. The result of this is that their kids are not learning at the same rate as others. We are very concerned about the learning gaps students will have when we return.

Through all this, we have learned that kids do best when they are attending the virtual class time. They seem to be calmer and more ready to do their independent work. Our students do not want to learn from a stranger. They like their teachers and want direction from them. We also have learned that we need to give the parents more strategies to help their children. Moving forward, we will plan for this. Parents did not ask for this and our hearts go out to them. We know they need more help to navigate this new world. If we were to do it differently, that is what we would have started with—educating parents first, and then the students.

As we move forward, I welcome your calls or emails so that I can explain our work and answer any questions you may have. Certainly, many more decisions will be made this summer. We have much more work to do and look forward to serving our students to the best of our ability.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Allyssa Andersen", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Allyssa Andersen
District Administrator