

100 Vista Blvd • P.O. Box 248
Markesan, Wisconsin 53946

To: Senator Luther Olsen
Date: May 15, 2020
Re: Markesan District Schools COVID-19 Review of Operations

I am writing to you to inform you of how our district is serving our students during the pandemic times. This is a difficult task trying to describe what challenges our school district has faced during the closure due to COVID-19 because of the multiple messages we had to respond to. Our administrative team, IT department and others have met to review what would be the best and more importantly the safest plan.

The concerns we faced at the outset were: parental fear of sending children to school, where the children's meals would come from, and child care issues. We were in contact with our county nurse as well as our nurse about what to do and we decided in the best interest of student and staff safety we would close on March 13.

The positive was that our 3rd quarter was ending March 20, so we had completed most of that term. This allowed our staff to use the data/assessments collected to figure into the 4th quarter which would be all remote. We started assigned remote learning the week after spring break which was April 13. Prior to this situation we had not done/provided any virtual learning. From March 16 – April 12, we gave staff time to prepare to deliver education virtually as well as for our district to plan for computers and WiFi devices to be distributed.

Some of the obstacles for sending out instruction and delivering meals were very challenging. Some of the challenges we discovered and have discussed during this process are as follows:

Can we reach all of our students virtually? We sent out multiple communications to determine which families needed devices/internet or some sort of technological assistance. Because we are a district that has 17 municipalities, we had numerous areas within the district that didn't have access to internet and cell phone service. After we received this information we purchased 75 Verizon jetpacks and prepared ## computers for families. We also notified families that the district had access points in both parking lots at the elementary school and middle/high school

Was virtual learning the correct way you go with our younger students? We spent two weeks reviewing the grade levels and what would be needed to deliver the best education possible to younger students. We decided that the best means for students 4K-3rd grade was educational packets. The district then mailed packets to all students 4K-3rd grade. Students in 4k-3 we offered educational packets mailed to them every four weeks during the closure. Teachers and staff planned for 20 days of instruction per packet. Teacher do post videos, lessons, and messages to the younger students who can get on to a device

What would we do with student meals in a district with high free and reduced numbers?

We made plans for meal sites throughout our district so we could reach students in need. Again knowing we have 17 municipalities we planned accordingly. We set up 5 delivery sites as well as personal deliveries to homes we knew didn't have means to get to the sites. We have used administration, PSLO, teaching assistants and volunteers to deliver the meals. Our food service staff came in 3 days a week to prepare the bagged meals which covered Monday-Saturday. We knew we had to meet the needs of these students during this crisis for families.

How can we keep engaging our students? Learning management platforms in our district prior to this pandemic were Google Classroom and SeeSaw. Many teachers have used online programs that have fostered continuity for learning- such as DuoLingo, Khan Academy, ALEKS math, Freckle, and IXL. We are also using platforms provided by technology companies like Zoom, Google Meet/Hangouts, and tools like Screencastify to make the learning visual and interactive. We are fortunate that the majority of our teachers, teaching assistants and administration are using either district offered computers or their own devices to connect with students through the technology. The use of Google Classroom helped students and families have a continuity of platform across the courses.

How have we served our students with IEPs?— Reaching and instructing via remote learning for this vulnerable population has been challenging. Many students struggle with the physical, cognitive, or communicative ability to interact virtually. We have worked with 72 families to meet the needs of 92 students who have IEPs. Many special needs children receive 1to1 or small group instruction tailored to their learning goals through Zoom or Google Meet. Students also learn and interact via SeeSaw. Packets were mailed home to families whose internet connection is unreliable, and teachers call these families to follow up with questions and offer support. Young children in early elementary school have had craft materials dropped off outside their home to complete projects that align with their learning goals. Many families are struggling with internet reliability and juggling responsibilities and helping students connect with virtual learning opportunities. However, staff continue to reach out and communicate with these families to determine the best way to meet the student's needs. Our staff have risen to this challenge with positivity, grace, and constant dedication to support students with special needs in any way possible.

How have we served our ELL Students? Our ELL staff has made direct contact via phone and technology with every EL student. Learning has been redesigned, adapted and supplemented. Our 34 ELL students had opportunities to have devices and internet support, instruction via video and audio, and bilingual support for students and families.

What communication challenges have we faced? – Teachers have made contacts with parents and students from phones, Google calls, and email. Staff have worked collaboratively to maintain contact lists noting who has been active and working, who may need a call or reminder. This effort then connects to the counselors and admin who also support reach out. Staff have daily logs of activities which also highlight the number of calls and communications made to students and families. One of the challenges was keeping students engaged in the learning, with technology issues throughout the district not all students had access to the internet or devices. We offered hotspots and devices to our students in 4th-12th grade. Some families chose not to pick-up a hotspot or device. Staff members have tried to reach out to those families via phone calls. Some of those phone calls went unanswered. Staff have tried to communicate on a weekly basis trying not to overwhelm the families.

What have we learned? The sheer amount of learning the staff has completed regarding: embracing techniques for remote learning, evaluating resources that suit the remote learning and clarity to learning needs, applying technology applications, and taking initiative to connect with each student is exponential. We aspire to embed the successes of these techniques, tools and tasks even when we return to the in-person instruction. This unprecedented situation has given us a lens to examine what is most important to help students grow, learn, and achieve. We have learned that many of our students are more comfortable and successful communicating needs and completing work virtually. We have learned that some families are more comfortable and willing to participate in meetings when they are conducted via virtual or other digital means.

How have we served students emotional needs? Our teachers, counselors and support staff have worked tirelessly to connect with students. Many class activities or one on one support video meetings involve conversation, engagement activities, and reminders to take care of health and well being. Our counselors have many virtual "appointments" to check in with families and students. Teachers have been very cognizant of offering more detailed, specific feedback to students regarding assignments in order to validate student work and progress.

Our staff has done an outstanding job serving students during this crisis and I applaud their efforts. Our principals have set-up Google documents/surveys where parents can respond to questions we have that will help now and in the future. Obvious improvements we need to make are technology access points, the amount of screen time we expect of students and certain grades per day, and interactive lessons need to be done throughout the delivery (engaging students). We also need to make changes to the entrances of buildings and offices to combat this situation as it relates to health safety like this.

What a learning experience this has been for all of us. Having this dropped on us without much warning, I feel we as a district did an exceptionally good job for our children and families. Yes, the educational process was different, but this also gave us a look maybe into the future of education or how we can mold the face-to-face model along with virtual means in a regular setting. With that said of the educational delivery being different, we didn't have time to be as well prepared as we would have liked to have been and we weren't able to experience what worked prior to rolling out this type of learning. Now learning what worked, what didn't work well, and getting feedback from parents, students and staff, we will be better prepared for something like this should it happen again. We are collecting reflections and surveys to make those changes to prepare for future needs and the 20-21 school year.

The purpose of this letter is to provide data and insight into our efforts. The demands on students, families, school personnel and school budgets have drastically changed in this Covid-19 shutdown. We hope this report illuminates where we have invested our time and resources to be careful stewards of the educational process and financial and capital resources. I would ask that you please continue to support the most important commodity in our great state and that is **our students!** I appreciate your work and understand the challenges you are facing.

Respectfully,



Superintendent
Markesan District Schools

Appendix-Facts that provide a better picture of our shift from face-to-face classes to virtual learning and educational packets

SeeSaw Usage for Markesan Elementary from 03/16/2020 to 05/04/2020

6931 Posts Added

3779 Comments Made on Student Work

2,754 Likes of Student Work

3,294 Visits by Family Members

Google Meets (Video Conferencing) by Month

Date # of Video Hangouts

Nov 2019 42

Dec 2019 16

Jan 2020 6

Feb 2020 3

Mar 2020 375

Apr 2020 1382

14 Day Active Google Classrooms Month Avgs

Nov 2019 35

Dec 2019 27

Jan 2020 41

Feb 2020 38

March 2020 72

April 2020 123

Total External Drive Shares

Nov 2019 909

Dec 2019 832

Jan 2020 2655

Feb 2020 2017

March 2020 7739

April 2020 23379

Files Added to Google Drive by Month

Nov 2019 6950

Dec 2019 7196

Jan 2020 8323

Feb 2020 9531

March 2020 14532

April 2020 43390

School Email has increased by 51% in the last month Total Emails 416,874 (+141,231)