



PRESCOTT SCHOOL DISTRICT

1220 St. Croix Street Prescott, WI 54021

May 26, 2020

Dear State and Federal Representatives of Prescott WI.,

I hope this letter finds you, your family, and your colleagues well. I would like to provide you with an update from the Prescott School District as we address the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. We are the second-largest employer among the five municipalities we serve. Our story is not unique, but it is a story that impacts children, families, and multiple communities directly.

Prescott School District's unexpected challenges began when we had the second positive case of COVID-19 in the state identified the first week of March. We were fortunate to work with our county's Department of Health who was very prepared to assist us in communicating the situation in an informed and comprehensive manner to our families, staff, and the community at large. Once informed, our entire staff took extraordinary efforts to (1) ensure the safety and health of our students, and (2) focus on our primary purpose of supporting teaching and learning. We were immediately faced with a hybrid situation of sustaining FAPE to all students and families that we are most likely to face this fall as for personal reasons some families will return to campus, but others will sustain to stay home. This predated the statewide closure on March 18, 2020. As a district like many, we are committed to sustaining the equitable access and support to 100% of our families and students. This is taxing our personnel and organization financially, mentally, and physically.

Prescott's educators diligently pivoted to prepare for the imminent mandated closure by analyzing the existing and effective curricular strategies that would *withstand the transition from the classroom to kitchen table*: those that would meet the desired outcomes and could be communicated via familiar technology resources. Each school in the Prescott School District (elementary, intermediate, middle, and high school) prepared for the short-term closure, and

when that was extended, evaluated how that virtual classroom could improve and made modifications to refine the learning experience.

As a district in a smaller, western Wisconsin community, there are many inequities regarding WiFi and Internet connectivity. In addition, we have students or families that did not have sufficient access to technology. Over the last 60 days, we are mortgaging our future by updating and replacing older technology to provide Chromebooks and hotspots to families in need. We believe this is the right thing to do in the here and now but places us in future risk as it expanded expenses today that may not be able to sustain or maintain our current technology portfolio. Moreover, we've incurred costs to abide by federal and state internet filtering that we were NOT required to previously address since the technology was only tied to our onsite WiFi v. home systems. No good deed goes unpunished.

Educators continually assessed what was effective and what required changes through parent surveys and feedback. One of our principals summed up our collective mission (as educators) throughout this tentative time, "When we cannot predict the future, we create it." Our administration stays abreast of the challenges to prepare for summer school programming and the school board continues to plan for the long-term vision of the Prescott School District.

In addition to our responsibility to educate, we responded to the need of our families to feed all children 18 and under. Our food service staff provided daily meals for pick up or drop off. Our bus drivers delivered meals and learning materials. We are providing over 4,000 meals per week for a district that enrolls 1,400 students. The current state and federal waivers to the foodservice programs are helpful to meet our community needs and obligation, however, the reimbursement falls below our true costs. Again it is the right thing to do during a time of crisis, but we are unable to sustain a loss leader.

The primary lessons we have learned are twofold: learning can take place with dedicated teachers and leaders anytime, anywhere, and the importance of exemplifying positivity and perseverance during adversity, and learning can take place with dedicated teachers and leaders.

The two-fold fiscal challenges the district realized during the closure are:

+ Fiscal year costs for 2019-20 were not decreased and we will be shouldering more costs the 2020-21 school year for PPE, cleaning agents, and staffing to address the hybrid model of bridging students onsite and students that remain at home. These are costs and inefficiencies in this reality that districts all across the state will be facing in the fall.

+ Western Wisconsin continues to lack the broadband internet inherent to make all student and teacher experiences equitable across our state. Providing HOT spots assumes mobile towers and networks exist; rural WI continues to be shortchanged in this respect. Adding more devices where the internet is not robust is a fool's errand.

As a superintendent, I know the challenge of needing to make unpopular or difficult decisions; however, I do want to stress that each district is situated differently with facility costs (we are a district where a majority of our sites were constructed prior to 1963 and are costly to maintain), and provide all of our youth sports activities. In Prescott, we doubled the size of our city's greenspace in 2016 dedicated to youth sports. It should be noted that our school district carries all of the financial investment and costs for our community in these areas. These services and athletic spaces are part of the fabric and civic pride of the larger Prescott Community. As I stated in the introduction, our story is not unique, but it is a story that impacts children, families, and multiple communities directly. Thank you in advance for considering Prescott School District's story and situation as you make difficult, valued, and principled decisions that will affect us all.

Sincerely,



Dr. Rick Spicuzza,
District Superintendent
Prescott School District