

I hope this letter finds you, your family, and your colleagues well. I would like to provide you with an update from the Sheboygan Area School District as we address the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the statewide school closure went in place on March 17, our staff quickly transitioned more than 10,000 students to virtual instruction within a matter of days. In addition to the middle school and high school students who take devices home on a daily basis, we distributed school-based devices (Chromebook or iPad) to EVERY 1st through 5th grade student. Learning packets were distributed to all 4K and kindergarten students.

Our teachers remain [committed to educating and supporting our students](#). Our elementary teachers are checking in with students every three days at minimum, middle and high school teachers are posting assignments online daily by the start of each school day, and teachers are replying to parent emails within 24 hours. For our most vulnerable populations, continued support is provided from our special education and English language learner teachers.

Outside of educational learning, we provided ongoing communication updates through [web](#), [e-mail](#), [texts](#) and [social media](#) to keep parents and community up-to-date. We created [an online question form](#) for parents to use and committed to providing a response within a 24 hour period. We are diligent in providing as much material translated into Hmong and Spanish as possible.

That just covers the education aspect. Our non-teaching staff has also risen to the challenge to support our community.

Our [nutrition services provide an average of 18,000 total grab-and-go meals](#) per week to youth in the community 18 years old and younger -- regardless of whether or not they are a student in the district. In addition, we partnered with Sheboygan County Food Bank to provide families with additional access to foods.

Our technology team [also created an online form](#) to respond to technical challenges and made arrangements to be on site three days per week to swap out or support devices to ensure students continued access to high quality learning. We gave 35 Hotspots with data plans to families who do not have internet access. School supplies were available for any family that needed them.

[PATH program](#) also transitioned to web based so our students would have continued access to mental health therapy services.

All of these efforts have not been accomplished without challenges. Even the most dedicated educators can never replicate face-to-face learning experiences and opportunities virtually. Students who lack parental support, whose parents were deemed essential and went to work every day, or older siblings babysitting younger opened the door for learning inequities that cannot be overcome in a virtual environment.

We encountered many language challenges. There are 37 different languages spoken by our students and families. The way forward to plan for summer school and fall programming remains uncertain. Special Education support wasn't always possible with virtual meetings. Even our applicant interviewing for open teaching positions has gone virtual.

Perhaps more than at any other time in our careers have the inequities of our system been laid bare by the pandemic. Sixty percent of SASD families already qualify for free/reduced lunch. We were dealing with under/unemployment before the crisis brought it so sharply to the forefront. Student families suddenly faced with losing basic resources like food found their focus on distance learning was no longer a priority, which will leave these kids further behind their peers next year.

It's been a challenge to remain connected with students. Only phone, e-mail, text, google hangouts or Zoom meetings are available, no door-to-door. Some students and families we struggled to connect with at all. When connections could be made, principals hand-delivered learning materials to families who couldn't or didn't show up for pick up times.

Despite all the challenges and uncertainty, we stepped forward as a community and have learned some valuable lessons. Even now, as we're using them, we're reviewing digital learning platforms and services to ensure more clarity and uniformity for students and families in the event we need them again. We have had great success with our online question/help forms and plan to continue using them in the future. We need to investigate alternatives for in-person field trips and specialized hands on learning activities so our kids can experience them even if they are virtual.

I cannot clearly convey how proud I am of this staff, how their dedication to their students has inspired me, how their love of teaching has propelled them to find any and all ways to reach their students. And despite the challenges, school in the Sheboygan Area School District is still very much in session.

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.

Sincerely,

Seth



Superintendent of Schools

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