



FREDERIC

SCHOOL DISTRICT

Board of Education:
Chuck Holicky, President
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June 24, 2020

Good morning Chairman Thiesfeldt, and Members of the Assembly Education Committee. I appreciate each of you for making time to listen to the various perspectives, insights, and experiences of so many advocates for student learning. Together, we can confront the challenges of this incredible situation. I am thankful for the opportunity to be here today, and I am honored to represent my eager students, supportive families, and devoted staff.

My name is Josh Robinson and I am the Superintendent of the Frederic School District, located in Northwest Wisconsin. For 22 years, I have been serving students as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, and 9 years as Frederic's Superintendent. I started in administration when I was 28, but I have missed the classroom every day. I love students and experiences we, as educators, get to share with them and their families. For instance, I was with my students in our classroom when the 9-11 attacks happened. We watched the television together, mostly quiet, just watching. While I certainly wish the attacks wouldn't have happened, they did. And in that moment, there was nowhere else I would rather be than with my students. While our COVID-19 reality is completely different, and I wish COVID-19 didn't happen, it's an experience I'm grateful to share with my students, families, and staff because we are all part of reshaping our future.

As educators, we have never faced anything like our schools closing, and our upcoming opening. Like you, my students, families, and staff have never confronted something like this. And yet, here we are, all together doing our parts to help our students succeed, both now and well into the future. We are all learning.

When school closed in March, we determined our main focus in Frederic would be ensuring our students remain connected to the staff and school. Above all else, we wanted their sense of belonging to be consistent or even grow. Regular, individual communications with students proved to be just what most of them needed. Parents also received individual phone calls from our teachers asking them, as parents, how they were doing and what they needed. While we understood it would take time to figure out the academic components of the closure, our immediate strength was our ability to communicate regularly and help students and parents feel valuable. This vital component of student academic success cannot be overstated. I'm so proud of our staff for committing to our District vision, to "Be Excellent" throughout this process.

Building trust throughout the process led us to the creation and delivery of discovery kits for three weeks of our June summer school. We have 217 students participating in this summer school option. A year ago, we had approximately 220 students participate in onsite summer school. There is a hunger for learning. We are building systems, which takes time, resources, and flexibility. High speed connectivity for all students and staff is absolutely essential. Hot spots are not solving our connectivity problem in Frederic or across the state. Investments in technology are inevitable and necessary. COVID-19 struck and its costs are great. Together we can confront the challenges and prove that we can be successful through adversity. We will get past COVID-19, at some point. However, when we do get past it, we won't be going "back" to normal. There is no back, only forward. COVID-19 was too big of a system interruption for it to not change the



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education system. This means we are defining, in this moment, the trajectory of change in our systems. Members of the Assembly Education Committee, we have a shared responsibility in determining the trajectory of change.

Our next challenge, that our system must be ready for, may not be a national pandemic. Instead, it may be a tornado that wipes out part of my District, a District that already boasts the highest poverty rate of the 39 districts in CESA 11. With our 24% poverty rate, Frederic doubles that of the CESA 11 average. That may indicate our frailty, but it also reveals something else.

We often hear, and say, our schools are the heart of our communities. While many will agree with this, others may argue that local businesses or industry are the heart of our communities. In rural districts like Frederic, not only is the school the heart of the community, the school is the economic engine that drives other businesses within the school district and region. With 100 full-time and part-time employees, the Frederic School District is absolutely essential to the economy. As the largest employer within the school district, we are essential, and not just because we provide a place for children to go during the day so parents can work. **We are where our people work.**

Please know, an investment in schools is an investment in the economy, communities, and jobs. The challenges we face with opening schools are many, because we want to have educational systems in our districts that are as safe as possible for all stakeholders. But the planning, preparation, and execution go well beyond our fall 2020 school opening. If we want to come out of this pandemic better than we were prior to the pandemic, then we will need long, sustained efforts at the district, state, and national levels.

We are on a new trajectory with how we serve our students. Although this trajectory is not yet defined, it will force us to be different. And that is ok. We will open school as safely as we can, in an environment we cannot predict. I do not know how COVID-19 will exhibit itself in our District, in nearby districts, or across the state leading up to and during our opening. What I do know is your support and trust will go a long way in our efforts to open as safely as we can, keep students in schools, and let educators know you support their dedicated efforts.

While I wish we weren't staring down COVID-19, I am grateful to be in this moment with my students, staff, families, and all of you working together to make sure our students are successful.

I am thankful for your time today, and ongoing consideration. I wish you well.

Josh Robinson
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