



“Every Student, Every Day, in a Unified Way.”

419 South Elizabeth Street • Whitewater, Wisconsin 53190 • 262-472-8700 • Fax 262-472-8710 • www.wwusd.org

Memo

To: Senator Stephen Nass

Re: Importance of the Whitewater Unified School District during COVID-19

From: Jim Shaw, Interim District Administrator

Date: 6/2/2020

During the COVID pandemic the Whitewater Unified School District is the center of community efforts to weather the educational, social and economic damage created by COVID-19.

Whitewater families and businesses not only look to the public schools for continuing education for children, but also for social connections during a time of isolation, and economic support for families and businesses. In a time of widespread community distress, the public schools remain a source of community pride and stability.

Although closed for face to face instruction, WUSD remains focused on student learning. We know that distance learning is not as effective as face to face instruction. This is especially true for our youngest, our disadvantaged, our English Language Learners, and our special needs students. I am proud of WUSD teachers, who literally overnight transformed instructional methods, learned new distance learning management systems, and developed individualized learning packets for every elementary student. They keep a communication log for students to track and assess engagement and learning. They know some kids are not meeting the usual face to face learning expectations, so they collaborate with other teachers to identify learning gaps and solve distance learning problems and challenges. Teachers are accomplishing all this while caring for their own families, teaching their own children at home, and experiencing the same stress that this terrible disease has caused all families.

WUSD is also supporting the community economically. Whitewater is more diverse and economically disadvantaged than average. Approximately 43% of our students are economically disadvantaged, 30% are Hispanic, and almost 16% are English Language Learners. There is community pride in the WUSD's food production and distribution efforts to serve our diverse and disadvantage families. The district food service workers produced and distributed 61,656 meals since 17 March, which includes over 8,000 meals per week as of late. Food distribution will continue until Monday, July 13. Whitewater churches and community food pantries, and restaurants organized efforts to supplement WUSD's efforts. Despite the best efforts of the District and the community initiatives, food and financial security remains a serious concern for many families.

Whitewater High School
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Lakeview Elementary School
W8363 R & W Townline Rd.
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Lincoln Elementary School
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Since the onset of the pandemic, WUSD fulfilled all contractual and legal obligations to employees and local businesses. We worked as a partner with the Nelson Bus Company to ensure continuity of services and the viability of the company during the pandemic by coordinating efforts to secure PPP funds from the federal government and reduce costs for local taxpayers. Our teachers and staff contacted homeless families, and followed up with disadvantaged families to provide technology devices, internet access, moral support and encouragement. Our special education teachers and paraprofessional staff continue to provide individualized instruction and support virtually. Approximately twenty percent of families are not consistently engaged with teachers, so teachers and principals follow up with every child and family to increase engagement in learning.

Despite the extraordinary efforts of the WUSD staff and families, we know we are not doing enough. We want our children back in school as soon as possible and as safely as possible. We need more technology (approximately \$100, 000 to provide needed technology to all families), more face to face instruction, more individual contact time for teachers and students, smaller class sizes for social distancing, more mental health interventions, significant changes in schedules, modifications in facilities, more PPE, more health monitoring and follow-up tracking measures.

As the pandemic subsides, schools will not be the same. Some learning is lost. Some students, families and staff will be unable to participate fully because of continuing health concerns. Some schedules, routines and procedures will be modified. Whitewater needs the schools during the pandemic. Whitewater will need modified safe schools, increased distance learning, and fully funded schools to recover from the pandemic. I ask that you view the public schools as the center of COVID-19 recovery efforts. Increased assistance and state support for the public schools is needed to recover educationally, socially and economically. Now more than ever it is important to invest in the public schools. To do less will hurt the Whitewater community now and for years to come.

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