



Judith Baseman, Superintendent

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May 14, 2020

Senator Roger Roth
Room 220 South
State Capitol
PO Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senator Roth,

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

As the sixth largest district in the state of Wisconsin serving over 16,000 students, I want to communicate clearly that even though our school buildings are closed, teaching and learning has not stopped. Our staff are connecting virtually each day in meaningful ways with our students and families to ensure that academic, social and emotional progress continues for every student, every day.

Our administrators have been working tirelessly to develop proactive plans to ensure that staff, students and families have equitable access to the resources they need and that communication is frequent and timely to build confidence and trust at a time of great uncertainty.

Our Early Childhood - 12 Distance Learning Plans have been in place since March 19th and will continue for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year until June 5, 2020. These plans have been developed and continually refined to provide access to equitable learning opportunities for all AASD students during the state-mandated school closure.

Distance Learning Plans for students in grades EC - 6 are supported by learning activity packets, grade-appropriate reading materials, and regularly scheduled direct teacher support via Google Meet. Distance Learning plans for students in grades 7 - 12 are supported by one to one Chromebook devices, online materials, and online teacher support. Our teachers, school counselors, and social workers are also continuing to provide social and emotional learning and support for our students within the virtual environment. In addition, administrators have worked with our staff and community partners to develop new ways to offer virtual therapy sessions and telehealth options to serve students and families.

School may look and feel different for students these days, but the strong and steady support our teachers, support staff and administrators continue to show makes all the difference. In addition to offering the

Distance Learning experiences as described, our staff members have been working extremely hard to engage our students and families in numerous ways. They have been creating handwritten postcards, personalized emails, innovative video lessons, virtual spirit weeks, and scavenger hunts. They have also been dropping off extra food for families, sending birthday cards, running by students' homes to wave, and leaving positive messages in chalk outside their homes.

All of these extra efforts go above and beyond any job description that one could have imagined during these unprecedented times. Thankfully, our public school educators and staff have often been called upon to find new and creative ways to engage students with a wide variety of needs, ability levels and family backgrounds. They have once again stepped up to take on the challenges that have come to us during this public health emergency and have become a voice of hope, constancy and encouragement.

Many of our support staff have stepped up to take on new duties in the face of this pandemic. Our Facilities and Operations staff have been delivering technology to families who need it all over Appleton. Our school secretaries have turned their schools into efficient print, copy, and packing operations as they worked to distribute learning packets for students. Our administrators have become their student's and staff's online motivators and cheerleaders, creating daily video announcements highlighting their student's achievements even while at home. Our coaches have continued to push and challenge our student-athletes with online workouts and accountability check-ins. Our Birth-Five Outreach team has worked to take their playgroups online so young children can still benefit and grow in their learning.

We are taking care of more than our student's minds. So far we've served over 119,498 meals to children in Appleton. We are encouraging ALL families with children 18 and under and persons with disabilities, over age 18, who participate in school programs, to utilize this program. No child in our area needs to go hungry. That is why we are including children that do not qualify for free and reduced meals as we recognize that more families are enduring hardships during COVID-19. We understand that many students rely on the foodservice program at their school and are committed to continuing to meet the needs of all students to the extent possible this summer.

As we commit to giving every student an equitable learning experience, we're learning that more than our families with socio-economic challenges need help. Our district is approximately 40% free and reduced, but we know more families are struggling. We've distributed 1,540 Chromebooks to families who don't have a device in grades K-6 and distributed over 425 hotspots to families without internet access in grades K-12. Additional funding and collaborative partnerships are needed to bridge the deep digital divide that currently exists in our district and across the state. I look forward to working with you and other leaders to address this critical need.

We know that even at its best, distance learning cannot replace the opportunities that are possible within a typical school-based program. We also know that this current situation is not ideal for our students, staff, and families. For many of our families, one or both parents are still working outside the home. For others, parents are providing care for younger siblings or another family member while doing their best to support their student's learning at home. We have done our best to support our families in managing these challenges by providing guidelines and daily schedules for learning at home.

All staff maintain and publish regular student contact hours to engage with students and families to provide learning opportunities targeting essential standards for each grade level and course of study. Weekly phone calls and virtual meetings with staff have also served to provide much-needed social and emotional support for students and families during this stressful time.



However, even with the heroic efforts of our administrators and staff in partnership with families, we recognize that school closures will result in increased gaps in student learning for all student groups due to the loss of direct instructional minutes. Thus, we anticipate the need for additional resources moving forward - both human and financial - to close the gaps that have widened during this closure period. In addition, collective efforts are needed to provide funding to support increased access to technology and internet services for all of our students and their families.

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 am confident that together, we can address the inequities that currently exist in access to online learning and the resources that are needed to close achievement gaps and meet the needs of ALL students and families.

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about the Appleton Area School District and our response to the challenges we have faced during this unprecedented time. I appreciate your service to the children, families and community and look forward to continued collaboration to ensure Success for Every Student, Every Day!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Judy Baseman".

Judith Baseman
Superintendent of Schools

