

BIRCHWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

300 South Wilson Street

Birchwood Wisconsin 54817

One of the Top 100 Schools in America



May 19, 2020

Dear Representative Quinn,

The end of the school year is upon us and I wanted to take this opportunity to share an overview of what teachers and students have accomplished over the past nine weeks and the challenges they have faced due to the closure of schools.

Routine practices changed rapidly in the school district when the order was initially put in place to close school. Staff members worked to ensure that students could still learn, would have food available, and would be supported emotionally during these tough times. Schools throughout the state were informed on Friday, March 13th that all school buildings must be closed by Wednesday, March 18th by 5:00pm. Luckily, the district had a scheduled teacher professional development day on that Monday, which was extremely helpful in preparing technology devices (chromebooks) for students in grades 6-12 and old(er) computers for students in grades 4-5. Students in grades PK-3 had to rely on sharing a device with a sibling/parent and/or using paper/pencil as the district did not have devices available in those grade levels for students to take home with them.

Since closing the doors, students in the middle and high school are using Google Classroom and Zoom as online formats to receive daily lessons and assignments while the younger grades use a combination of paper/pencil and computer programs such as Raz-Kids, Epic, Splash Math, and Accelerated Reader as well as Zoom. Teachers attend professional development meetings via Zoom three times a week. Mondays are set aside for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), Tuesdays for learning more about Zoom, and Thursdays for learning more about Google Classroom and Class Dojo. Teachers and associate staff are in contact with students via Zoom, email, private Facebook, or telephone to offer support, answer questions, and encourage students and families. The greatest challenge is limited broadband and reliable internet service to homes. This has definitely caused inequities in the way students are serviced and able to access materials.

Another aspect that changed and required immediate addressing was the need to provide meals (breakfasts and lunches) to students. With about 57% poverty, it was critical we provide food to families. For the past nine weeks of closure, parents/students have participated in a makeshift drive-thru where vehicles pull up to the lunchroom doors and a bag/bags of food for the week are delivered to the vehicle or food is delivered directly to homes as transportation is a challenge for some families. The school program is operating in partnership with the Birchwood Food Pantry so families who have been part of the Backpack Program this school year are

still receiving weekly food supplies as well. Many teachers, associate staff and office staff are volunteering to support the lunch team to ensure all goes smoothly. We are lucky to have a great team of people!

With the academic format in place, the next hurdle is now supporting the mental health needs of students and families. Some students are doing exceptionally well with the online, at-home format while others are struggling to make that transition. Luckily, the district hired a school-to-home liaison at the beginning of the school year with funds from a mental health grant awarded to the district along with a grant and partnership with Washburn county. That person contacts families/students daily to check on their needs. Teachers and administration are also checking in to see what families need.

As we look toward the end of the school year, we are still making decisions on summer school, end-of-the-year grading for middle and high school students, and the postponement of the graduation ceremony. Many informative Zoom meetings have been set up by DPI, legal firms, and the CESAs providing guidance in making decisions.

Thank you for your support and your leadership in these unprecedented times. I was sad to see that you are leaving office as you represented the Northwoods and the school districts well. You were always responsive and listened and shared ideas and thoughts-thank you for that!

Sincerely,

Diane Johnson
Superintendent