

# DODGEVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT

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State Senator Howard Marklein

May 24, 2020

Dear Senator Marklein,

I believe much of what I am writing in this letter could easily go unsaid. In fact, I have resisted writing because I already believe you see what I see and I don't want to be redundant and clog your mailbox. But, I fear an overall tide might be turning statewide, and maybe it helps to give you some ammunition when you get into conversations at your level.

In the Dodgeville School District, I could not be happier with the response of my teachers and families. Since March, teachers have picked up the workload, maintained relationships with kids, and begun training for an uncertain fall. What I hear in team meetings and through parent communications are stories of teachers going out of their way to provide meaningful activities. Some are better at it than others. And there are tough moments. But it is their honest concern for their student's well being that brings tears of disappointment in grade level meetings. And those tears then bring teamwork as other teachers problem solve with those who are struggling to find a path. Our teachers have delivered homework to the doorsteps of students who cannot access class meetings electronically. They have worked at school to set up and distribute Chromebooks to students who are adjusting on the fly to a whole new way of learning, and living. Teachers have served as support systems for confused kids and frustrated parents who are cast into a whole new existence. I am very proud of their work.

On another side, I have support staff who are doing anything they can to help. From delivering meals, to emptying lockers for students to providing emotional support. I invite you to come to our high school kitchen on any Monday, Wednesday or Friday to watch as staff members pack hundreds of bagged meals to be picked up or delivered to kids in Dodgeville and Ridgeway - just remember to wear your facemask.

Lastly, my administrative team has been working overtime to support their staffs through this spring's uncharted water and lay plans for our summer learning program and the start of school next fall. That team has demonstrated a resilience in the face of uncertainty that is nothing short of heroic. I can tell you, my employees are not taking the easy way out. They are grateful they are in a business that continues to be essential and allows them to be working and receiving a paycheck throughout this pandemic. And they have not taken it for granted. They have volunteered in droves for the extra things we have needed. They have gone above and beyond and I, and the families of the Dodgeville School District, could not be more appreciative.

To share a story, a couple weeks ago I ran home for lunch on a Friday at noon. As I drove back to school, I noticed one of our elementary teachers approaching a house where a family was waiting on the stoop for her arrival. She was delivering a May basket to one of her first grade students. I noticed that she was managing her social distancing, but the student had all he could do to keep from running out to give her a hug. When I complimented her through email for going above and beyond the call of duty, she explained to me that she knew this particular kid needed a little extra push and that while she was on the sidewalk, she was able to talk to the student and the mom about the academic lessons they were learning. Her response, "whatever it takes in this weird time, I'm going to do it."

As I look forward to next year, I know there will be many challenges and I am trying to do my part to put the Dodgeville School District in a position to be successful in a very uncertain time. I know there are going to be costs that we have never experienced. We have ordered specialized cleaning equipment. We are providing hot spots to families who don't have access and we will need to continue to do so. We will have to staff health rooms differently and support virtual learning for those who cannot come to school in a whole different way. I fully realize that the financial challenges at the state level will be significant, but I also know these kids have one opportunity to grow up and develop their skills. I don't believe we can get ahead as a society by shortchanging them. A couple quick thoughts I have:

- In some way, acknowledge that school transportation and health related costs are destined to increase. I can't imagine a scenario where parents will feel comfortable placing their children on a  $\frac{2}{3}$  full school bus each morning and I know we will have to assure parents that we are doing everything we can to provide a healthy environment when schools reopen.
- Summer learning has been a big part of our programming in the past couple years. There have been tangible educational benefits to our summer learning program, but I can't imagine we will be able to have the participation we have had in past years. The lost student count will definitely hurt this district financially even though the programming will be consistent. I would personally like to see the state allow schools to carry over last summer's numbers to this unusual summer in hopes that the summer of 2021 will be closer to a new normal.

Above all, please don't fall into the narrative some columnists or media talking heads seem to want to spread that teachers are milking this time, sitting home sipping coffee and relaxing in their bathrobes. I have many staff members who are working very hard, and I know many teachers in other districts who are doing the same, because they truly believe in the work they are doing and they know their kids deserve nothing less than the best they can deliver. When you get into conversations in the capital, please deliver that message to those who see teachers and educators as nothing other than political opponents.

The challenges will be plentiful moving forward. That is true in all aspects of our society. Thanks for reading, and thanks for the work you continue to do on behalf of all Wisconsinites.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey D. Jacobson