



**ITHACA**  
School District

**'HOME OF THE BULLDOGS'**



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Dear Senator Marklein and Representative Novak,

As you may know, the superintendents have been asked to tell our district story. Ithaca is a small district with complete community support and staff wearing many hats. Rather than quoting our low socioeconomic percentages or reiterating all the dates decisions were made, I would like you to hear from my teachers. When asked what the biggest struggles or successes were, here were some answers.

*I think the biggest obstacle has been the internet. Since we live in a rural area, it has been a struggle. People need social connections. I am one of them. I like to interact with everyone and that is the big reason I call my students. I like to hear their voices and get a conversation going. Hearing each other laugh again has been helpful. Empathy is the other thing that has worked for me. I see what is happening in my home but I do not know what other homes are going through. I have had nice communications responding to parent concerns. People are being stretched thin most days. I like what our school has done to respond to this, keep them involved but do not overwhelm them. One family moved through all this. I asked if I could talk to the student on the phone. I talked with him and he finished his work while we were on the phone together. He was thinking it was a mountain to climb and did not know how to start. I restated how I felt he is a good math student and I will help if he needs it. Replying that things can be done tomorrow or I will call and get them going has helped in many situations. Parents were/are not prepared for this and letting them know we appreciate what they are doing has made a difference.*

*This is not ideal in any way and people are doing their best with what they are given. Some struggles have little to no solution and those are the tricky ones. We can only do so much and I have witnessed this school doing so much more to provide for our students. ~Paula*

Music class is not a necessity for success. It is important, but very hard to use as a measuring tool for "success." In this time of virtual learning, it has been extremely difficult to even connect with families, much less know how music learning is going. However, it has slowed things down enough where I can connect with students on a more personal level. My choirs were asked to tell me their favorite song and why. It has been fun to talk about different artists and genres as a way to connect with students. My heart aches to do more. ~Liz

*I noticed that one of my students was not engaging with the work assigned for two weeks in a row. I was sending emails to him and his parents and called them multiple times over those weeks. Even though I was not getting ahold of them, I kept leaving messages affirming that I missed this student, and asking how I could help them support them. Just last week I was able to get through. I had a 30-minute phone conversation with this student, and we started from the very beginning. He just needed someone to guide him through the process. Without an adult who knew what he needed to do and was able to guide him through each step, the problem-solving was too much, and he had just given up. Students also need us to affirm that we are here for them, they have not let us down, and that we will celebrate their successes. ~ Emily*

Dealing with a pandemic was not taught in my classes as a superintendent, nor was predicting the weather but I do that, too. We are all doing the best we can do, and for me, it includes teaching high school math, another hat. Are there unhappy parents and staff? Yes, but there are many more hardworking teachers, paraprofessionals, principals, business managers, food service workers, and custodians (to name a few) that are working with our parents and students to their very best ability. It is a day-to-day struggle for some staff; they have aging parents living with them, they have to teach their own children along with up to over 100 students, they have their own mental health to consider. Some staff members work every day including weekends, some have office hours, some are volunteering to hand out breakfast and lunch, and some drive supplies for art directly to the homes. Regardless, the Ithaca Family is keeping watch on their own, because it does take the entire community working together to raise children.

Thank you for your time, and we hope you are well.

Sincerely,



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