



**Office of Superintendent**

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May 15, 2020

Representative Amanda Stuck  
Room 4 West  
State Capitol  
PO Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Representative Stuck,

I appreciate our ongoing communication during the past several weeks. This letter is intended to give you an update on the efforts we have made in the Menasha Joint School District (MJSD) thus far during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Our District provides services to approximately 3600 students with a diverse set of needs. Over 60% of our students qualify for free or reduced lunch, 16% of our students have special educational needs, and 15% of our students are English language learners. These diverse needs drive many of the efforts we make during regular operating conditions and are magnified by our current situation. All of our plans must include strategies for meeting the wide array of needs within our school population. In mid-March when school closure was imminent, we began planning in the following areas to meet those needs:

**Food Service:** Knowing that many of our children rely on us for two and sometimes three meals per day we worked with our food service provider, Chartwells, to develop a plan to get meals out to those who needed them. We established three school sites and two neighborhood locations for food distribution beginning immediately. Hot or cold lunches were made available and each person 18 and under in the community who wanted a meal received lunch along with breakfast for the next day. After two weeks we were able to organize meals for weekends, which are distributed on Fridays. We are averaging 1700 meals per day and 6300 on Fridays. Last week we surpassed 89,765 meals served.

**Technology:** While we have enough devices for all students in grades 3 – 12, we do not currently allow these to go home with students, but make them available at school for students to use during the day. We surveyed parents regarding the need for devices at home and distributed nearly 1500 Chromebooks over the past several weeks. Wi-fi access was also an issue for several of our families so we suggested possible resources (Spectrum was offering limited free service) and provided a limited number of hot spots. Despite these efforts and continued attempts to make connections, we know that some of our families do not and will not have the access needed to be successful away from the school setting.

**Teaching and Learning:** Prior to closure we provided staff development to teachers in order to help them learn some best practices. We established online tools for students to learn and continue developing their reading and math skills. We created an at-home/online learning site on our website that provides online learning tools and additional instruction in reading, mathematics, and social emotional learning to students. These tools and some guidance for at-home/online learning strategies and schedules were provided on our COVID 19 webpage, found here <https://www.mjsd.k12.wi.us/district/home>. We purchased and sent home books to our Early Childhood through grade 5-students that are theirs to read and enjoy while at home. We also check-out books through our library system that can be exchanged at curbside pick-up and drop-off locations weekly.

*“Reaching Every Student Every Day”*

**Communication:** We established consistent, weekly communication with our staff and parents in order to keep up with changing developments throughout the closure. Staff communicate as needed with parents and students and have established “office hours” in order to be available for questions or assistance. Though much of the communication is related to ongoing teaching and learning, we also have folks who are reaching out specifically to students who have special educational needs or who are experiencing some type of mental health issues. Keeping those relationships in place has been vital to several of our students and families.

Through all of this we have kept all of our approximately 450 staff members employed. Depending on their specific role, staff are busy teaching or making contacts with their students and parents, completing online staff development training hours, and/or helping with other duties as needed; such as food preparation and distribution, Chromebook distribution, delivery of paper copies, food, or technology to families without transportation, classroom and locker supplies pick-up, managing office communications from staff or parents, and other ongoing administrative duties.

Our administrative team has ongoing discussions about summer school options as well as what fall might bring as we begin a new school year. We also continually review and assess our current practices hoping to learn for future application. We communicate on a regular basis with the Menasha Health Department and with our professional colleagues at CESA 6, WASDA, WASB, WCASS, WASPA and WASBO to ensure we have the best resources and the most up-to-date information.

I am proud to work with the dedicated team at MJSD. We are not designed to provide at-home/online instruction nor are our families prepared to operate within this model of delivery, yet everyone on our team has stepped up to do whatever they can to help out with whatever we have at our disposal. We are doing the best we can with what we have in the time we have had to implement. I’ve never been prouder to be a Bluejay.

I look forward to discussing challenges and opportunities that resulted from the COVID 19 closure with you as decisions are made regarding budgets for the 2020-2021 school year and beyond. Thank you for your attention to this matter and your leadership for our State.

I hope you and your family continue to be well.

Sincerely,

*Chris L. VanderHeyden*

Chris L. VanderHeyden  
Superintendent of Schools