



School District of New Glarus

P. O. Box 7
1701 Second Street
New Glarus, WI 53574

District (608) 527-2410
Fax (608) 527-5101
www.ngsd.k12.wi.us

May 14, 2020

Dear Governor Evers, Senator Erpenbach, and Representative Pope:

I hope this letter finds you, your family, and your colleagues well. I am writing today to share an update from the New Glarus School District as we address the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

First, and foremost, I think it's important to note that although our school buildings have been closed for two months, our schools have very much been open, with educators working tirelessly to keep students connected, engaged, and learning during this challenging time. In order to gauge our effectiveness, four weeks after the school buildings were ordered closed, we surveyed our parents about our response to the pandemic, and received the following feedback:

- 98% of parents rated the district as “Good” or “Outstanding” when asked “Overall, how well has the district handled the pandemic?”
- 96.5% of parents rated the district as “Good” or “Outstanding” when asked “How well has the district connected to students and families during the pandemic?”
- 81% of parents said “The amount of work my children were expected to do was just right.” The rest of the answers were split between too much and too little.
- 100% of parents who were getting the meal program responded that it was working “Good” or “Outstanding.”

In order to achieve that level of satisfaction, there has been extensive work both visibly and behind the scenes, including in the following areas:

- Technology Access: We have provided hotspots for all families that did not have Wifi at home so internet isn't an issue and all students can access on-line instruction during this time. There are still areas of our district where the internet is temperamental, but everyone has some level of access.
- Middle School and High School Instruction: Fortunately, we already had 1-1 Chromebooks across the district, and our middle school and high school already used a robust learning management system called Canvas, that many colleges and universities use. Therefore, our middle and high school staff and students were quickly able to start on-line instruction.
- Elementary Instruction: Moving elementary instruction on-line was a bit more challenging. We started by having teachers gather packets of materials for students and delivering the packets to students' homes for the first two weeks of instruction. During those first two weeks, our staff learned Google Classroom, and we distributed technology to students so they could start on-line instruction after Spring Break. Our staff jumped on board and have been teaching on-line ever since.
- Encore and Survey Instruction: At all levels K-12, our students are fortunate to have more than just the basics during this time too, including music, art, phys ed, guidance, survey, and elective courses.

- Special Education: Our Special Education Teachers and Therapists worked tirelessly to develop plans for each student that were as close to their IEPs as possible in a virtual environment. Those individual plans were sent to each parent, and if there were any concerns an IEP meeting was held. Since then, teachers, therapists, and aides have been working with students in 1-1 or small group settings to meet their needs in this new environment.
- Struggling Students: Overall, we've had strong engagement from our students, but when it appears a student is falling behind or struggling in some way, teachers, counselors, and/or principals reach out and help the family come up with a plan to get back on track. In some cases, a staff member gets assigned to a student and checks in on them multiple times per week to make sure they have the support they need to be successful.
- Staff Collaboration: Our staff is meeting as much now, if not more, than before the pandemic. They meet in grade level teams, subject area teams, leadership teams, and full staff teams to work through all the details and logistics of this new environment. Most importantly, they want to make sure they are focused on the same goals and learning targets so all students have access to high quality instruction, even during this challenging situation.
- Administration: The Administration has been constantly meeting and reviewing legal guidance to determine what changes are needed to policies, procedures, and handbooks in this new environment. Unfortunately, everything changed overnight and many of our policies, practices, and handbooks must be modified for our current situation. Additionally, we have been meeting regularly with staff to support their work and provide leadership and guidance.
- Meal Delivery: We have been preparing and delivering meals every weekday to almost 300 students, which is over 25% of our students, for the duration of the time the buildings have been closed. Additionally, we deliver double meals on Thursdays and Fridays so the students have food over the weekend. We believe that helping families with their basic needs, such as food, is critical during this time of economic hardship for many families.

Although the snapshot above does not give the full picture, I hope it helps you envision the challenges and opportunities that we've worked through over the past two months. I'm very proud of the work our district has done during this unprecedented time, and am thankful our parents have recognized our efforts by their feedback on our survey.

I welcome your calls or emails so that I can explain our work and answer any questions you may have. You can reach me directly at jennifer.thayer@ngsd.k12.wi.us or (608)527-5516. We will also gladly provide you with updates of our progress as we continue to move forward in this uncertain time.

Thank you for your leadership in the State of Wisconsin, and for your strong support of education!

Sincerely,

Dr. Jennifer Thayer, Superintendent
New Glarus School District