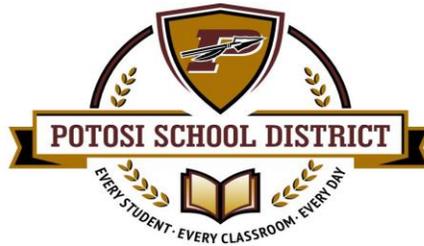


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May 24, 2020

Senator Marklein

As I sit here on the day before Memorial Day, I cannot help but think “what if?”. Today, I should be partaking in my first graduation ceremony as the Superintendent of Potosi Schools. I am certain that as I would look around our school auditorium at graduates, community members, and school personnel, I would be filled with pride.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 outbreak has made it impossible to be sitting in a crowded auditorium with graduates, family, staff, and community members today. But, the response of our community, students and staff during these last ten weeks has also filled me with pride. I am writing today to let you know how our school “family” has come together to work to meet the needs of our students and families during this historic period.

As our staff jumped into the process of educating our students outside the normal classroom setting immediately, we kept two beliefs in mind. First, our stance has continually been to give each of our students every opportunity to master as many of the topics we would normally work through during the 4th quarter of the school year. Through video-recorded lessons, digital assignments, email conversations, phone calls, and teacher-made worksheet packets, our staff has ensured that education has continued without direct face-to-face contact.

Our second key conviction during this time has been the fact that we believe that even while we are away, it is vital to continue to nurture the relationships we have created with our students, families, and staff. Staff has continued regular check ins with students where the conversations are more about “How are you doing?” rather than “Are you getting my homework done?”. Similarly, our administrative team has done weekly Zoom staff meetings to be sure we are celebrating the successes of our teachers and aides while also helping talk through struggles and frustrations.

A large part of continuing our relationships with our students and their families is the work we have done to make certain that school-made meals are available for all that need them. Since the very beginning of our school closure, our food service employees have distributed approximately 200 breakfasts and lunches per day; this number represents over 60% of our total student population.

While our staff has done exemplary work during this time, we have seen some obstacles in meeting our two overriding objectives. While the district has purchased hot spots for some families to improve their internet access, we still have some students that are forced to drive to the school parking lot to use our wi-fi to guarantee a reliable, consistent internet connection. Our district has continued to communicate with our students and families to see how we can adapt our instruction to best meet their needs. Also, while we have always been proud of our social-emotional learning delivery, we are concerned about the emotional needs of our students that we are unable to manage in this distance learning model.

“Every Student, Every Classroom, Every Day”

As we look to a return to some type of face-to-face instruction (whether that be in late summer, this fall, or later) we are aware that we will need to address issues caused by the closing of schools buildings due to COVID-19. We know we must deal with remediation issues to provide students with the skills needed to lead to their academic success. We also know, we will have to monitor and react to any social-emotional needs of our students that this time away has created or increased.

As schools in Wisconsin move to a plan to safely reopen, we look to you in state government to help partner with us in guaranteeing we address these student needs. After seeing the hard work put in by our staff during this time, I am confident that Potosi Schools are ready to meet these challenges head on, just as we did during the last ten weeks.

I know that you understand the importance schools play in our rural communities and I hope you explain this role to your colleagues as decisions are made to move forward to our state's 'return to normal'. As always, thanks for your time and continued support.

Kurt L. Cohen
Proud District Administrator
Potosi Schools