May 21, 2020

Dear Senator Bewley and Representative Meyers,

First of all, I want to thank you for all of your support for public schools in Northern Wisconsin. Many times I wonder if the people in Madison even know there are people above highway 29. Your continued support is necessary for all of us to be in the important conversations in the Capitol and your work doesn’t go unnoticed. The hard work teachers do each and every day often goes unrecognized by many. Since the closures due to COVID-19 took effect, I believe parents may now have a better understanding of what it takes to keep our diverse population of students motivated in a classroom. Through the closure, we also hope the parents and public realize that our school is here for more than just getting a diploma. I would like to share with you the ways Prentice teachers and staff have stepped up to help our students with not only their education but also their social and emotional well-being, their nutrition and staying active during this unprecedented period.

March has brought many changes to the way we educate students in the Prentice School District and our story begins a few years ago. With very limited school budgets and grants, we have been working on improving our technology within the school district. Many other districts throughout the state were able to go 1:1 with devices in one year. It took us several years to be able to have enough updated equipment for each student to use. Today, we still do not have enough to send home with every student in our school district, but enough to fill in the gaps when parents have nothing for their children. We also worked on having teacher information stored on their school computers that would be accessible for them when they are away from the building. Teachers having this capability just happened in the past year. I believe this process was really important because we were having too many snow days that would push school well into June. Plans were in the making on how we could have school while home on a snow day. These advancements happened none too soon, when the Covid-19 hit our nation, businesses and schools were now closing. In a couple days, our teachers were able to use technology to create lessons for all of our students while at home. Many of the teachers weren’t used to creating lessons for on-line and remote learning. They put many hours in to be sure our students were continuing with their education. All teachers worked tirelessly building remote learning and meeting daily with students in BlueJean or Google meetings to help educate the children of our district. Our teachers have not only met with students during the day, but they have adjusted their lives to teach at night if necessary. The teachers understand that being flexible with the time of day, they could meet and communicate with students and parents. This was very important as many of our parents have to work outside the home even with the COVID closures. I am so proud of our teaching staff in the way they have taken on this huge responsibility. They truly are servant leaders.

Has it all been positive? No, in fact we have found deficits in our teaching abilities that are difficult to solve. The access to high speed internet for many of our students and their families is not existent. Due to being a rural area, either they have no access or access is so costly it prohibits families from purchasing it. This has caused an added learning division for students that will cause educational gaps. All Wisconsin citizens should have access to high speed internet. The students that do not have internet access were provided learning packets by the teachers to help keep those students on pace with their peers. This added a lot more preparation time because the teacher has to teach in dual platforms. As we start closing out this school year, we are evaluating the pros and cons of remote learning. We are currently planning how we can change our teaching methods to be better prepared in the fall, if we will not have face-to-face schooling.
The teachers also continued to being a vital piece in improving curriculum for our students of the school district. They have attended meetings regularly, looking at reading/language arts curriculum to make it better in our district. They also have met with special education teachers to be sure we are providing our students with disabilities, an education that does not leave them behind any further with their peers.

The support staff has worked side by side with the teachers planning lessons and helping to deliver the lesson plans to the students. Without the support staff it would be difficult to continue to provide education to students with learning disabilities. They can meet on-line and continue the work teachers have taught to the students through their lessons. They provide a safety net to those students who need the extra supports to be successful.

During this time, our school district has provided 234 lunches and 234 breakfasts each day for our students. We have a 50 percent plus poverty rate in our school and we felt it is very important that we continued feeding students. That way the parents didn’t have to worry about where their children’s next meal was coming from. Our school’s bus drivers committed each day to deliver the breakfast and lunch meals to the students. Not only were the drivers food delivery, but they also delivered and picked up school work from our students when necessary. Talking with parents, this was a highlight for many of the students when they saw the drivers with the meals. Our cooks have been fabulous making meals for the students and packaging them up safely for the delivery to them. They have provided nutritious meals that promote healthy growth for our students.

Our janitorial and maintenance staff, which is limited in numbers, took the time the past couple of months to deep clean every area of the school building. They cleaned every inch of the classrooms to be sure we are safe when the teachers come to their classrooms to work on lessons. It also provided a great start on preparing for next year when we hope students are back in the building.

Our office staff have been so helpful to everyone at this time too. They have been responsible for making sure deliveries of student work are sent home and returned to the teachers properly. They have taken and answered questions from parents admirably. Also, have tried to make everything in the school district run as smoothly as possible. Everyone is grateful for the time they have spent helping to educate our students, sending information home, and keeping up with to the day-to-day items.

The school counselor has been instrumental in talking with students and keeping them emotionally prepared for anything that is thrown their way. Weekly, she has sent out messages for students on how to keep positive and moving forward with their goals of college if they are graduating. She has planned events for the seniors so that they felt important during what would have been their graduation time.

It has been a long and difficult process making sure we are doing the best we can with all of our students. They have missed a lot from not being at school each day. Many of the students have missed all of their co-curricular events for the spring. Many had high hopes of achieving state goals and now those goals are shattered. Our juniors have missed their prom. For some it isn’t important but for others it has been something they have been looking forward too since they were little. The seniors have missed the most with this being their last year in the Prentice High School hallways. Our community has been great making posters and supporting them however possible. Our Facebook page is being filled with their pictures, goals and ambitions. We are still hoping later on in the summer we can provide them with a graduation that they will never forget. These students have been through a lot. They are battle tested and will do great things in the future for this state and country.

Most of our students prefer learning in the classroom from a teacher each day. In our rural community it is ideal for the students to attend a brick and mortar school along with attending with their peers. I believe we have done our best with limited resources to provide the students with the education they need to not have huge learning gaps. We will continue to find ways to enrich our students lives to ensure that they do not lose any educational ground during these closures.
The support staff, teachers, and administration have worked tirelessly to provide our students with the best education possible during this time. We have tried to decrease the learning gap being made by this virus and provided the students with a quality education during this tough time. Everyone in this school district has put their heart and soul into our students. Something we do each and every day!

I am sharing this with you to provide insight on what is happening in our school district during this time and our staff will continue to provide an education to our students to meet their needs. If you need any further information, please do not hesitate to give me a call.

Yours in Education,

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