June 2, 2020

Representative Rob Summerfield
67th Assembly District

Dear Representative Summerfield,

First and foremost, it is my hope that this letter finds you and your family healthy and well during these interesting times. The School District of Colfax, along with most other districts in the state of Wisconsin have made significant adjustments and plans (in less than 5 days) to operate in a COVID-19 pandemic world. Per the Department of Health Services order, our schools, playgrounds, baseball, softball, track, football fields, and facilities remain closed.

We have entered week 11 in this unprecedented operational mode for public schools. Also, I understand that re-opening, public schools, in-person is a priority in order to get our economy back to its previous levels. Currently, we are serving approximately 600 breakfast/lunches daily through curb side pick-up and delivery. Teaching is being done from laptop to Chromebook and by the use of teacher’s personal cell phones. All of this is taking place while many families have multiple siblings and in some cases inadequate broadband. Lastly, we had adjusted our traditional high school graduation to a “drive-up” format.

My administrative team and I met on Saturday, March 14 for four hours to plan and prepare our staff for what has turned into long term virtual schooling. We executed our plan, presented it to staff and prepared for virtual learning which began on March 19 and concluded on June 1.

During this time, our teachers were in contact with their students, daily. Along with contacting students and families, our teaching staff was instructing, answering questions, and assisting students all while being isolated from the outside world. Technology is a great thing, but it is not perfect.

Our families, overall, have been positive and supportive. They are working with our school district while trying to assist and supervise their children, and in many cases working full time jobs.

My staff has made a strong effort to meet the needs of all of our students while working under less than ideal conditions.
A few additional items I would like to share with you include:

**Safety:** We are being charged with the responsibility to provide a safe and healthy environment in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. If the current situation is still present at the beginning of the school year on September 1, we will likely need an extreme amount of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for students and staff, daily which equates to increased expenditures. Also, the continued sanitizing and deep cleaning of our school has increased workloads and products needed to provide a safe and healthy environment.

**Technology:** The increased use of technology in a virtual setting has introduced a series of entirely new obstacles: i.e. teaching and learning remotely, the lack of adequate broadband service, the use of “hotspots,” device issues/repair/replacement. Currently, we have approximately 600 mobile devices (Chromebooks) in the hands of students and 80 laptops in the hands of teachers.

**Fiscal-Budget:** We are quickly approaching the second year of the biennial budget. Due to the high likelihood of increased expenditures, we not only need the dollars which were approved in 2019, but in addition, we will need an increase to cover all of the added expenditures for the health, safety, and wellbeing of our students and staff. If, in turn, our state aid dollars were frozen or reduced, we would likely need to lay-off teaching staff. 

**NOTE:** our school in Colfax is the largest business entity in the town/community. We have 113 employees and we clearly impact our local economy. If we are faced with lay-offs, this would directly impact our local economy i.e. local businesses adversely. Parents want and expect their children to attend school in-person. This will require the dollars from the biennial budget to be preserved along with an increase to make our schools whole. Along with these items, our hiring must be completed now – not in August. If we do not receive fiscal updates until August or September, our school year with students will have already begun. I am respectfully requesting your support in soliciting the federal government to back-fill any state budgetary shortcomings for Wisconsin.

To conclude, we are facing an invisible enemy that has changed our world. The School District of Colfax will continue to provide the highest quality education under adverse conditions. We welcome your partnership in solving these important issues. The education of a generation and their future is at stake. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions. Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

William C. Yingst Jr.
Superintendent
School District of Colfax