



SCHOOL DISTRICT OF MAUSTON

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Greetings Senator Marklein and Representative Kurtz from the School District of Mauston:

We are #OneTeam. Months before the current coronavirus pandemic became the theme of our thoughts and words, the School District of Mauston's staff, students, and leadership adopted this phrase as our motto. After March 17, when the doors closed to our students for the last time in 2020, that motto became *much more* than a simple hashtag. *It is who we are.*

While our teaching staff worked to shift learning from face-to-face to an online platform, our food service and support staff enthusiastically worked together to create a meal program for our students. Nine school buses daily have crisscrossed the 204 square miles of our district to deliver breakfasts and lunches to every family who requests assistance. Seven locations in the City of Mauston are pick-up stops, where support staff members stand ready to hand meals to parents, brothers, and sisters – one boy comes almost daily on his bicycle to pick up food for his family and his neighbor's family. The Mauston School District delivers approximately 6,150 meals per week.

Online learning began in earnest just a few days after the students boarded buses on March 17. Think of it! In a matter of days, teachers were tasked with reaching their students using only technology. Gone were the morning meetings, the hugs, and the high fives. One of our eighth-grade teachers said, "I miss greeting my students at my classroom door! (It) gives me a chance to "read" students. If I sense a student is upset, we chat in the hall. Now I can't see how students are feeling. I worry about them!" I think Mrs. Koca's feelings are shared by most of our teachers.

As our staff rose to the task of remote learning, we quickly realized that many of our rural students did not have access to internet connections. In addition to checking out hundreds of devices to individual students, the district responded by purchasing and distributing 144 internet hotspots to Mauston and Lyndon Station families. The early days presented many obstacles such as getting students and families connected and assisting them with websites and programs that did not always work properly and consistently. One of our third-grade teachers described it this way: "At first, students were really excited to be doing online lessons and activities. Around the middle of May, the excitement had worn off, and I worked hard connecting with students and families to keep them engaged and active ... (It took) lots of phone calls and one on one Zoom chats to keep students excited and engaged."

How does a teacher measure learning success when all of the usual ways of teaching, assessing, and surveying students are gone? Mr. Ingles says it took the development of "sustainable and efficient routines" for presenting schedules, lessons, and activities with the children. Not only did our teachers have to help the students figure out the new "how-to" of learning, in most situations they had to start from scratch, as he stated, that he had to "adapt to the situation myself, learning new technology programs quickly..."

I am extremely proud of our staff who never gave up searching for ways to “connect” in a personal way with their students. A fifth-grade teacher stated: “I am proud of how many students worked really hard and did well completing the work that was given to them. There was one student who motivated me to get up every morning at 6:30 to send my daily dose of knowledge survey by 7:00 a.m.! I knew she was up and looking for my survey each day. She never missed a day and completed everything on time. So proud of that girl!” Mrs. Elftmann also praised another student “who doesn’t particularly like face to face school” and who “would often challenge me with his behaviors.” She reports that this young man “soared in online/at-home learning!”

What about the unique situations related to secondary classes that are almost entirely “hands-on” in nature? Some courses required especially creative responses! As our high school construction teacher said, “Going from majorly hands-on teaching to ‘hands-off’ was difficult. If I had the students do any projects, I had them use common household items.” It was not possible to do projects related to using tools, because there was always one or more of the students who did not have the tools at home. Perseverance was the key.

Alongside all of these efforts, our Board of Education has been engaged in an in-depth study of our facilities’ needs. We are currently surveying our community to gauge their interest in and willingness to support a variety of referendum options.

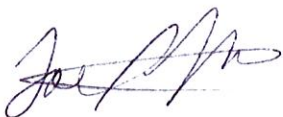
It is impossible to encapsulate the outstanding efforts of our staff in one letter. Whether it is the aides and other staff who sewed 300+ masks that we distributed to the community, or the work of our custodial staff to sanitize and refresh classrooms, the teachers who stayed up late at night preparing the next days recorded lessons, or the office staff who have stood by to answer the many phone calls from anxious families -- we have *not for one moment stood still, nor have we given up.*

The “Mauston story” is always, *always* about the students. It is about the first-grader waving to her teacher on a Zoom chat. It is about the ninth-grade boy making chocolate pudding for his foods class with his working mom at nine o’clock at night. The Mauston story is about the middle school student who watched her younger siblings all day and sent in her assignments for English, math, social studies, and science in the evening. It is about the hundreds of phone calls and thousands of messages exchanged for the good of our kids and our communities.

We are ... **#OneTeam.**

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joel Heesch". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a faint horizontal line.

Joel Heesch
Superintendent of Schools