



June 4, 2020

Dear Rep. Hesselbein, Rep Pope and Sen. Ehrbenbach:

I have very much appreciated your support of public education over the years. Even though I am a new superintendent, I am well aware of the work you have done and continue to do to support districts such as Middleton-Cross Plains Area. I view these efforts as a partnership and one I don't take for granted as I know districts in other parts of the state don't benefit from the kind of support MCPASD gets.

You are likely aware that close to 90 districts have contacted state legislators since May 15 to tell their story in the face of the current COVID-19 pandemic and the impact it has had on students, staff, families and our larger community. I am certainly aware that times are tough and that legislators will have to make difficult decisions in the coming months. I know public education won't be immune from these conversations and will be impacted.

However, while I believe it is more important that legislators hear from rural districts and those that don't have the kind of resources and support that MCPASD does, we do have a story to tell.

First, I want to thank you for your efforts and leadership in these difficult times. I also want to share how the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District is responding during the COVID-19 pandemic and mandated school shutdowns that changed almost overnight how we fundamentally operate.

Our District made the difficult decision to close our schools with the last day of instruction on Friday, March 13. Prior to that date and since that time, our COVID-19 Planning Team has been meeting regularly to respond to the ever-evolving developments and guidance to best support our students, families, and community during these unprecedented times.

Unprecedented times call for unprecedented action. Our families are learning in a virtual environment made possible because of the creative, flexible and persistent efforts of our staff. They work each day with consideration and care and go above and beyond to help families overcome many obstacles of learning from home. Consider the following since schools were closed in mid-March:

- Provided nearly 2,500 Chromebooks to students whose families didn't have enough devices so that their children could participate in virtual learning.

- Provided more than 100 MiFi devices to provide internet to our families who did not have access to it. In addition, we have created hot spots in some of our school parking lots and worked with area internet providers to make families aware of hot spots in or near the neighborhoods in which they live.
- Put a meal distribution program in place in just one day after schools were closed at nine sites across the District in neighborhoods with our highest percentage of students on free or reduced lunch. To date, we have provided breakfast and lunch on 57 weekdays since March 17 and served approximately 37,000 meals.
- Provided three distinct platforms for students to use for online instruction. Each platform was appropriate for the students at the particular level using it.
- Surveyed MCPASD families one month after online instruction began to find out how much time students were spending on virtual learning. A majority of the 2,900-plus who participated in the survey reported their students were spending 3-4 hours daily on instruction and nearly 70 percent felt the amount of time and difficulty of instruction was appropriate. We also found that fewer than 200 students were not participating regularly in virtual learning.
- Special Services teams at all of our schools provided families with access to suggested home schedules, routines, break activities, and additional offerings to connect and help maintain social and emotional wellness.
- Communicating with families, staff and community has been a top priority. Our COVID-19 webpage includes coronavirus information, safety tips, mental health resources, meal pick-up locations, remote learning resources, answers to frequently asked questions, and each of the communications sent to families during the pandemic.
- Students and staff throughout the District have reached out to support the community through donation drives for food, protective gear and sanitizing material that were provided to food pantries, hospitals, families in need and other community groups.
- Staff have been flexible in this new environment. Many staff members are responding to the needs of students by scheduling 1:1 virtual meetings, coordinating support and creating specific check-in times for students who are struggling. It has been our goal to let families know that they are not alone. We are better together!
- We made the decision to keep staff employed. Not only does this send a message to our staff about their value to our organization, as a large employer in the area, we have a significant economic impact on our community.
- Maintenance projects, along with three construction projects as a result of our successful 2018 referendum, are ahead of schedule and most will be completed early.
- The community has expressed enthusiastic support for our staff. Testimonials in the form of emails and social media comments to the incredible work they are doing continue to pour in.
- Although there are many unknowns surrounding the start of 2020-21 school year, we are preparing for various possible scenarios.
- The Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District remains in session through June 5

We are proud of the work we have done to support students and families. However, there have been various challenges, obstacles, disappointments and setbacks that we are working through. The cancellation of sports, concerts, and end-of-year events are opportunities lost forever for our students.

While we place an emphasis on social-emotional learning, we are concerned about the specific emotional needs of students that are more challenging to manage using the virtual learning model. We are deeply concerned about the academic progress of all of our learners, and especially concerned about our at-risk students. As we look to the future, there will be greater demands placed on staff to acquire new skills to handle these new and different situations and expectations. Our need to have highly trained staff has never been greater than for the coming school year. All of these situations will pose new challenges and put stress on our current resources.

As state leaders, it is important for you to know the actual impact of the pandemic on local school districts. It might be assumed that schools are saving money on facility and contracted services, but we also have additional expenses for food service, technology resources, special service needs, as well as many other areas such as lost revenue due to fee refunds, uncollected rental and lease payments. As we resume operations in fall, we may need to put more resources into our organization to comply with recommendations and guidelines for restarting school. We are rethinking everything from busing to lunches, to health room protocols, to classroom instruction and even student movement within the building during the day. Any of these changes will place a stress on our resources.

I am hopeful we can work together to ensure a successful start of the new school year in fall. I am so fortunate to be part of a school district with dedicated, hard-working and caring individuals. Our students and families continue to amaze me with their spirit and grit, even in these challenging times.

Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions so I can explain our work and answer any questions that you may have.

Sincerely,



Dana Monogue, Superintendent