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Dr. Mark Elworthy
Interim Superintendent

June 25, 2020

Senator Chris Larson
Room 20 South
State Capital
P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

Representative Christine Sinicki
Room 114 North
State Capital
P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Senator Larson and Representative Sinicki,

The St. Francis School District is celebrating the end of the 2019-2020 school year, certainly one that will be forever remembered, and I would like to take this opportunity to share our story with you. In the face of the many unprecedented challenges presented by COVID-19, I have witnessed firsthand the immense kindness, creativity and passion our educators have become known for. Although our physical buildings were closed due to this pandemic, I assure you that education, and the many other services provided by our public schools, continued in the St Francis School District.

During times of uncertainty, communication with stakeholders is of the utmost importance. I have sent communications to families twice per week since mid-March to ensure access to timely and accurate information from both the District and our local health department. Staff have had weekly check-ins with me to open doors of communication between those on the front lines of providing services and the decision makers in order to guarantee alignment and high quality, responsive services for all. Most importantly, our staff have had daily and meaningful conversations and instructional opportunities with our students. Staff tirelessly worked to find the best fit for each student and family to ensure access to ongoing learning.

The St. Francis School Board made the decision to provide one-to-one technology for students during the 2018-2019 school year. This investment in our District allowed us to pivot to remote learning efficiently and effectively. A remote learning survey was sent to parents at the end of April, so that the District could calibrate our offerings centered on the needs of our families. Overall, 96% of respondents indicated that their children were using Google Classroom to access their learning. However, remote learning is not without its challenges. We had to be particularly responsive to our youngest learners who could not access technology by providing customized paper packets for learning, translate our communications to families for whom English is not their primary language, and find innovative ways to provide specially designed instruction to students with disabilities.

Beyond academics, the District has continued to offer food services, which have been utilized and appreciated by our families. Our dedicated food service team has served 20,458 meals during the closure. Food insecurity was not the only hurdle some families had to face during this challenging time. Our staff remained vigilant and responsive to the mental health needs of our students and their families. Our partnership with the Aurora Student and Family Assistance Program has allowed us to continue to refer people in need to high quality mental health services. Our Student Services Team has also been dedicated to meeting the needs of students and families during this time by providing virtual therapy sessions, frequent phone and email check-ins, home visits and referrals to a variety of agencies.

Once only occasionally utilized by the District, tools such as Zoom and Google Meet have now been a commonplace in all facets of our operations. I hosted weekly community engagement events via Zoom on topics such as literacy, mental health, facilities planning, remote learning and public health. These events allowed community members, families, staff, administration and the School Board time to come together around shared interests. In addition, parents of children in Special Education were afforded the opportunity to meaningfully participate in their children's IEP meetings on Zoom. Parent participation and engagement in this important process remained at pre-closure rates of 80%.

Our staff has been cognizant of the fact that our students have missed the day-to-day interactions with their peers and trusted adults. To create a sense of normalcy and honor students' accomplishments, our Building Principals creatively approached the end-of-year celebrations, while keeping social distancing measures in mind. Our youngest students were able to wrap-up the year with a fun "reverse parade" where they got to see their school and have the staff send them off in style. Our Intermediate School students were treated to a virtual promotion ceremony complete with picture montages and guest speakers. For the culmination of their K-12 career, our senior students were treated to a festive graduation parade enjoyed by the entire community. The end-of-year celebrations may not have looked like they had in the past, but that did not stop us from having some fun!

In closing, we would like to thank you for your representation and dedication to our community. We would welcome the opportunity to have further discussions around our past efforts, current summer programming, and the extensive planning process for the 2020-2021 school year

In Partnership,



Mark Elworthy, Ed. D.
Interim Superintendent of Schools
St. Francis School District

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