
Fwd: Schools, sports, and COVID-19

1 message

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To: JAMIE KRISTA <jamie_krista@msd.k12.wi.us>

Mon, Nov 9, 2020 at 1:56 PM

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"The School District of the Menomonie Area, by embracing the unique needs and using the strengths of our diverse community, is dedicated to preparing ALL students to become lifelong learners, caring individuals, and responsible citizens."

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Alex & Erin** <1108elm@gmail.com>

Date: Mon, Nov 9, 2020 at 11:47 AM

Subject: Schools, sports, and COVID-19

To: Tanya Husby <Tanya_Husby@msd.k12.wi.us>, <charlie_schneider@msd.k12.wi.us>, <david_styler@msd.k12.wi.us>, <clint_moses@msd.k12.wi.us>, <jim_swanson@msd.k12.wi.us>, <amy_riddle-swanson@msd.k12.wi.us>, <christopher_freeman@msd.k12.wi.us>, <tricia_thompson@msd.k12.wi.us>, <penny_burstad@msd.k12.wi.us>, brian seguin <brian_seguin@msd.k12.wi.us>, Casey Drake <casey_drake@msd.k12.wi.us>, JOSEPH ZYDOWSKY <joe_zydowsky@msd.k12.wi.us>

Dear District Administrators and School Board Members -

Thank you for pausing in-person instruction at the high school for the next few weeks. I know that to a very large extent the rationale behind this decision is the lack of appropriate staffing, but I urge you to consider that doing so is also the right choice for additional reasons, as follows:

- **In-person instruction is no longer nearly as safe as it was a few weeks ago.** Infections in our community are on an exponential rise and are likely to continue to increase for a few weeks at least.
 - Mitigation measures such as masks and distancing are effective, but **they are not sufficient** in this new, higher-risk environment. (It's like how a pair of thin knit gloves is totally fine if it's 35 degrees out, but cannot protect you from frostbite if it's -10 - the risk environment has changed.) Last month, masks and six feet of distance were fairly good protection for students and staff, as the likelihood of someone in the building being infected was statistically low. That is no longer the case. The risk is much higher now, and as we know, masks and distance aren't perfect.
- **Staff absenteeism is likely to increase across all schools the next week or two** at least. The **cases being reported today are, in general, people who were infected 5-10 days ago**, as there is a built-in delay due to time to develop symptoms, to schedule a test, and to then receive those test results (due to increased volume of testing, results in our clinic that used to come back next day are now taking 2-3 days and sometimes longer), **so it highly likely that cases will continue to climb for at least the next week or two**, even with increased mitigation measures. That means that student and staff absenteeism is likely to climb the next few weeks as well. It would be better to be ahead of this than playing catch up.
- **Transitioning to a virtual environment helps send the signal that it is not safe to be out and about**, which is what all of our local medical, public official, and public health folks are trying to communicate. Now is the time to hunker down - our hospitals are about full.

- **A virtual learning environment allows many of the staff to work safely from home.** We do not want the heartbreak of nearby Chi High when they lost a beloved teacher, and working for the school district should not require people to put their own health in danger. Yes, teachers are essential, but instruction can be carried out remotely.
- **Families were pledged in August that the district would transition to blended or remote models if cases in Dunn County increased.** I have received many distraught communications from parents who agonized over the decision between in-person and virtual this summer, often due to family members having conditions that put them at high risk for complications from COVID, but chose in-person as they had faith that if things worsened, the school would transition to blended or online. These families are now stuck - they no longer feel it is safe to send their students to in-person school, but they have no other option unless there were to withdraw and switch to home-schooling, which is not feasible for most families with working parents or without backgrounds in education. They feel as if the district has kept moving the goalposts on them, and that this level of risk is not only something they didn't sign up for, it's unacceptable.

In light of all of these reasons to pause in-person instruction, **I highly encourage you to also suspend in-person instruction at the middle school level and to shift to either a blended or some other model at the elementary level** (opt-in virtual for those students who want it and whose families can support it, to decrease student density in the schools?). I am fully aware that it is a significant hardship for many families from a daycare standpoint if elementary schools are not in-person 5 days, so I urge you to please do everything we can to help decrease transmission in order to still have some level of in-person available for those youngest students who need it.

Additionally, for all of the reasons bulleted above, I also feel that it would be **highly inappropriate to continue athletics at this time.** We KNOW that athletic activity poses a higher risk of viral transmission, due not only to physical proximity but also due to increased respiratory depth and rate. (In one recent study of an outbreak from an ice hockey game, one pre-symptomatic infected player transmitted the virus to 8 of his 10 teammates and 5 of the 11 opposing teammates from just one game - the two teams didn't share locker rooms or socialize before or after the game, so this transmission to the other team players actually occurred on the ice <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6941a4.htm>). **Our district did not follow the recommendation of our public health officials this fall, but we should follow them now** - we cannot play fast and loose with the well-being of our community. I understand the importance of athletics for our students' physical and emotional health, but we can use this opportunity to teach them a lesson in resilience and in making sacrifices for the good of others. We can do hard things. We can be creative. We can find a way.

Thank you for your continued service to our students and to our community.

Sincerely,
Alexandra Hall MD