

August 10, 2020

Downsville Elementary  
N2681 460th Street  
PO Box 78  
Downsville, WI 54735  
(715) 664-8546

Knapp Elementary  
110 South Street  
Knapp, WI 54749  
(715) 665-2131

Menomonie High School  
1715 5th Street West  
Menomonie, WI 54751  
(715) 232-2606

Menomonie Middle  
School  
920 21st Street South  
Menomonie, WI 54751  
(715) 232-1673

Oaklawn Elementary  
500 21st Street South  
Menomonie, WI 54751  
(715) 232-3798

River Heights  
Elementary  
615 24th Avenue West  
Menomonie, WI 54751  
(715) 232-3987

Wakanda Elementary  
1801 Wakanda Street NE  
Menomonie, WI 54751  
(715) 232-3898

Dear Distinguished State Legislators,

Thank you for your continued support of the children in the State of Wisconsin and the School District of the Menomonie Area (SDMA). Thank you also for the significant school funding increases approved in the 2019-21 state budget. As the SDMA continues planning for the 2020-2021 school year, it is important that the legislature understands how our school district is responding to the current public health emergency.

When schools across the state were forced to close last spring, the school district moved all learning to a remote learning environment, which was a big problem for many people. Not all families in the school district have access to the internet or a device to access it, so the school district was forced to develop alternative plans to provide as many services as possible. Access to the internet was not only a problem for students, but also the teachers, administrators, and other staff members in the school district. Strictly controlled access to buildings helped mitigate this issue for some staff members who were not quarantined, but reliable access to broadband needs to be expanded in Dunn County!

Despite the challenges with broadband access, teachers in the SDMA were phenomenal in reaching out to all of our students and making sure they have access to learning materials. Those students who do not have access were worked with on an individual basis and provided with learning packets. Computer carts at the elementary schools were stripped down so the devices could be distributed to as many students as possible, and a limited number of hotspots that had been obtained through a grant were helpful for a small number of children.

Surveys from last spring indicate that families appreciated the fast turnaround in how SDMA teachers were able to figure out how to create lessons online for their students, but suggestions for more synchronous instruction and the streamlining of web resources will be used in preparations for the possibility of another closure in the future. Here is [a link to a presentation](#) that the high school French teacher shared with

the school board to demonstrate one example for how remote virtual instruction was used in the SDMA.

School board members recognize that at-home learning added a new level of stress and responsibility for parents. Parents and other caretakers were forced to adjust to working from home (or the loss of work altogether) while becoming the key support for their children's daily learning. The school district worked to strengthen communication and better support the adults working with children at home, and with a number of students taking college courses while in high school, the district helped to coordinate with the colleges to ensure our students' education continued.

Now the school district is busy with the enormous task of planning for what education will look like this fall. Plans are being developed for in-person, blended, and online instruction, but we cannot predict how the state of our public health might change. The Board of Education has directed administration to do whatever they can to allow for in-person instruction this fall, and in an effort to prioritize in-person instruction for our youngest students, the district has committed to hiring up to 20 more additional teachers to help reduce class sizes to promote cohorting and physical distancing in our schools.

Though it might be easy to assume that schools saved money by closing buildings last spring, the opposite will be true when considering all of the additional expenses associated with reopening. We are seeing additional costs in delivering food, upgrading technology, providing services to children with special needs, and so much more. We will have many previously unanticipated costs for the 2020-2021 school year such as PPE, thermometers, hand sanitizer, extra cleaning supplies and extra staff to keep buildings and common areas clean and sanitized often. Additional teaching staff, classroom furniture and supplies, and online learning platforms are other expensive additions that will have a tremendous impact on the school district budget.

We understand that schools will be asked to play a part in resolving the looming state budget shortfall, but we wanted you to be aware of how our district has responded to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to helping to keep our children, staff, and community healthy and safe, our schools are also being relied upon to support the mental health of the children in our community. Having funding available to add more mental health supports and resources such as counselors, social

workers, and training would be very helpful in helping our community work together through this pandemic.

Thank you again for your support of our local public schools and I look forward to working together to move forward in these unprecedented times.

Respectfully,

David Styer  
Board President

Penny Burstad  
Board Vice President

Clint Moses  
Board Clerk

Tanya Husby  
Board Treasurer

Amy Riddle-Swanson  
Board Member

Jim Swanson  
Board member

Tricia Thompson  
Board Member

Chris Freeman  
Board Member

Charlie Schneider  
Board Member

Joseph E. Zydowsky  
District Administrator