



# School District of Alma Center - Humbird – Merrilan

*Lincoln Schools: "The Best Place to Learn"*

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May 11, 2020

Dear Senator Smith,

I hope this letter finds you well during this unprecedented time. I wanted to take a moment to provide you with an update on the impact of the coronavirus and COVID 19 has had on the School District of Alma Center-Humbird-Merrilan. We have faced several challenges over the past couple of months, but we have also seen some amazing work being done by our staff.

I am proud to say that when we started hearing word of the impact the coronavirus was anticipated to have on our country, community, and our school's, our administrative team immediately began working on a plan to address some of the potential impacts we would be facing. As we began our planning, the work that we did all focused and was centered around one thing, our students. That included focusing on their safety and well as developing a plan to best address their academic needs.

At the elementary level we did not send technology home with our students. We initially sent about 2-2.5 weeks of physical learning home with them. Once we got beyond that timeframe, we sent out activity boards to help students review what they had learned the previous months in school. We purposely chose to not send new learning after those initial few weeks, as families had enough to navigate in their day to day life. Families are not trained educators and would have had a difficult time with teaching their students from home.

At the Junior/Senior High School level, student's took their school issued Chromebooks home with them so that they teachers could provide an online learning environment for them. During this time, staff also provided the students with a sense of routine and as much normalcy as possible by continuing to provide not only academic materials, but by also staying connected with our students to provide social and emotional support as well.

I am so proud of what I have seen from our staff, students, families, and community over the past 2 months. Together we have worked together to make decisions that are in the best interest of our students and families. I believe we have done an excellent job of tending to the social/emotional aspect of our families. Our staff communicated on a weekly basis to touch base with families. Our administrative team provided video updates on a regular basis so that students and their families

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always had the latest and most accurate information possible. The staff has grown in multiple ways to learn Facebook pages, Zoom, Google Classroom and multiple other technology platforms to stay in touch with families. Throughout this entire pandemic our teachers, students, parents, administration, school board, and community has shown their value to education by continuing to persevere and trust the decisions being made during these challenging times.

During this time, we have also been working diligently to meet the physical needs of our students. Our Food Service staff has worked above and beyond the call of providing nearly 3,000 meals per week in order to ensure our families have food on the table throughout this entire pandemic. As a school district, we are also teaming up with our local Lions Club as well as church organizations to provide additional meals and food that goes above and beyond the meals provided during the week. These types of partnerships are what make living in a small town so special.

Of course we have faced several challenges throughout these past 2 months that we hope to learn from and improve. Initially, the glaring need for broadband internet was made quite apparent. There are several outlying areas in our district where we simply do not have adequate service available. Our local internet and cell phone companies were more than willing to try and assist, but the fact of the matter is the accessibility in some areas is simply not there. We made alternative lessons and plans for these families, but ultimately all families should have the same access as everyone else.

Along with the access to the internet, another challenge we faced was that very few of our teachers had received any training on virtual learning. They had days to learn, adapt, and continue providing learning materials for their students. We have learned so much from day one, and with the feedback from students and parents, we have continued to make many changes throughout this time. Likewise, students were not trained for virtual learning, and they have also had to learn and adapt throughout this time. It is difficult to engage and motivate some students virtually when they are also the ones that we struggle to keep engaged and motivated in the classroom, but our staff have been working extremely hard to reach these students.

While there has been several challenges that we have faced over the past 2 months, I believe there is a great deal that we have learned which will only make us better at educating our students in the future. We are better because this has helped us realize we need to be able to communicate more efficiently via technology in a timely manner. At the state level, we need to make it a priority and fund rural broadband internet. Over the past couple of months, we have learned that we are better "together". Whether we are physically together or having Zoom meetings together, we will get the job done and take care of each other. We took care of our students/families by providing them with meals, activities to occupy their time, and checked in on them on a weekly basis. It also helped us realize what learning really is "essential". It also helped us realize that no matter what, things could always be "worse" than your current situation.

We are a public school built to educate students within the walls of our schools. We feel we did everything we could from the very first day we were told schools would be shutting down, to look out for the safety and well-being of our families and staff. Have we educated them in a traditional manner? Absolutely not! Did we do some things wrong? Depends on who you ask, but for the most part, our families and community has been very positive about how the district responded during this difficult time. Without previous experiences and insight as to how to educate during a pandemic, we did the best we could, with what we were given. I don't feel we should really be moving forward looking to be able to rely on "Online Learning" with the systems we currently have in place. Unfortunately, to make Online Learning a viable option for our students, we need our parents at home to guide our students through that process. As we know, many of our parents are working and there is no one at home to guide this Online Learning process.

It also became apparent that our students feel the same way about Online Learning. We have heard repeatedly from students how they wanted to be back in school, in a classroom, with their teachers. These past couple of months has made the students appreciate all that they had in a bricks and mortar school. Our schools provide a place for students to go to everyday so they can receive a quality education, interact with their teachers and classmates, and provide them with a safe learning environment where they feel valued and cared for by every adult in the building.

As we continue to navigate our way through these unprecedented times, I welcome your calls or emails so I can further discuss what we have done or answer any questions you may have. There is still a lot of planning and work to be done as the end of the school year approaches and we look forward to the 2020-2021 school year. We will continue to develop those plans and continue to make our decisions based on what is in the best interest of our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Fischer", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Paul Fischer

Superintendent

School District of Alma Center-Humbird-Merrillan