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Dear Legislators:

We hope that this communication finds you and your family safe and well. I am reaching out today to share with you how the Green Bay Area Public School District has been working to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on our students, staff and families during this unprecedented public health emergency, resulting in school closure.

Today, I am writing on behalf of the more than 20,000 students we serve each day in the Green Bay Area Public Schools. Like all school districts across the state, we have and will continue to do the very best we can with what we have during the COVID-19 school closure. It is important to recognize the diversity in the District's student body: more than 60% of students qualify for free and reduced meals, upward of 1,000 students are homeless during the school year, more than 3,000 students receive services for special education, and more than 4,500 students' first language is not English. In spite of these inequities, the District has successfully delivered not only a continuity of learning during the school closure, but also daily and weekend meals, essential school supplies, and social and emotional supports to ensure that students feel safe, supported, and loved by their school family during this separation. I've included a [link](#) where you can see just one of the hundreds of outreaches that our schools are making each week.

Since first learning of the possible pandemic in late February, we have been working around the clock, often in collaboration with colleagues from the five largest school districts, our local CESA, the Department of Public Instruction, and various state associations - WASDA, WASB and AWSA, to ensure that we have the best resources, and most up-to-date information. We have also been seeking and receiving guidance from both the state and local department of health, the Centers for Disease Control and our local medical community to ensure that our decisions regarding program delivery ensure the safety and well being of students, staff, families, and our community.

When we began our planning in anticipation of a possible school closure in late February, because we were a school district that had invested and leveraged resources to ensure that all of our students had access to devices, we were able to plan forward accordingly. Our one-to-one device program at the secondary level allowed students to take Chromebooks home at spring break, and for those who did not, the District developed a plan to deploy the remaining Chromebooks. While the Chromebooks have been vital in providing virtual learning opportunities, the lack of access to WiFi, for both students and educators, has created more inequities. Recognizing that many of our students do not have internet

access at home, we have been providing students for many years a [WiFi filtered hotspot called a Kajeet](#). This has proven to work well for some students; however, it does not address limited broadband issues, which makes it difficult for students to participate in all virtual opportunities.

Our elementary continuity of learning at home was structured quite differently for a number of reasons. First and foremost, we wanted to be sure that during the school closure, our elementary students were afforded a continuity of learning that reflected similar learning opportunities and programming that they were experiencing in the classroom. Students were given materials prior to leaving for spring break on March 13th, the same day the Governor ordered schools closed, and since that time have received ongoing deliveries of learning materials, including Scholastic books. More than 100,000 Scholastic books have been delivered to individual elementary students, that were selected according to the student's reading level (as identified by the teacher), to be culturally responsive, and in Spanish for children enrolled in the bilingual program.

Second, while we have devices for every elementary student, we currently do not have the capacity to ensure internet and broadband access at home. We anticipate that we will need thousands of additional WiFi hotspots (we currently have 1,000) to go fully virtual when needed and thus have 635 WiFi hotspots on order. The District has also been working in partnership with a local vendor and the Department of Public Instruction to purchase routers for home use to address the Broadband issues as well as looking to determine if and how we can purchase WiFi services for students at home. We recognize that the glaring ongoing inequities to access WiFi are not only impacting the children and families in Green Bay but many across the entire state. Over the years, we have taken a number of steps to try and address the digital divide including writing and submitting a Race to the Top grant for WiFi in Brown County; and working in partnership at a local level as well as state and federal level to address access and broadband concerns -- none of which have paid the dividends that have resulted in all District students being able to connect to our schools virtually.

In addition to universal programming for all students in grades 4K-12, we also designed and are implementing special programming to ensure a continuum of services, support and learning for our students receiving special education services, English Language services, Head Start programming, tiered interventions and those receiving [McKinney-Vento](#) services. I am including a [local news story](#) that highlights the work we are doing to meet the needs of our students receiving special education services.

As noted, our staff has been working around the clock since we learned of the possible pandemic in late February. They have done an extraordinary job throughout these many months, continuing to be flexible, responsive, empathetic and compassionate as they work to address the individual needs of their students and families. Planning and professional development is ongoing for all staff as we hold tight to the key principles of our continuity of learning framework that includes: ensuring **connectivity** with students, families and each other; **self-reflection** to determine what is and isn't working, as well as what is needed; **planning forward** in collaboration with their teams; and **pausing and resetting** as information, opportunities, and needs continue to change.

Communicating clearly to our families, staff and community has and will continue to be a priority. Parent communication is provided in English, Spanish, Hmong and Somali. Our families and community can access the most up-to-date information through our robust [GBAPS Coronavirus website](#)

that includes locations for 14 meal distribution sites, resources to access basic needs such as housing and meals on the weekends, resources to support and extend learning at home, answers to frequently asked questions, and ongoing updates to parents/guardians, reflecting the ever changing information during this pandemic.

Our food service workers have done an extraordinary job, providing more than 200,000 meals to-date for children, [serving at 14 different sites](#) come rain or shine during the school week. In addition, our community outreach team has applied for and received grants of approximately \$100,000 to work with community partners to provide meals to our families on the weekends, and most recently received grant funding to provide students with [basic school supplies](#) at home. Our social workers, family engagement coordinators, counselors, translators and support staff have gone above and beyond to ensure that all students at home are safe and well.

While the District has been doing its very best with available resources, there are still opportunities needed to ensure equity for all students. For some students, we recognize the school closures resulting reduction of direct instructional minutes will negatively impact the District's success with closing achievement gaps for all student groups. The digital divide clearly has limited equitable access to students learning at home. Second, while our staff is doing the very best to meet the needs of all students by providing interventions, resources, etc., there is a need to capture the minutes lost in order to continue on the trajectory of gap closing. Thus, we are anticipating the need for additional resources -- human and financial -- to close the widened gaps and equitably serve ALL students.

During the school closure, we have received numerous communications from parents indicating that while they are doing their best to support their children's learning at home, many are considered essential employees and therefore are juggling work, providing educational support for their children, and maintaining all the other aspects of home life. For some children, this has resulted in a disconnect from school and/or a lack of motivation or assistance to continue their school work at home. Our school leaders, working in close partnership with staff and community, including our school resource officers, are doing whatever it takes to reach out, connect, and support students and families to address resource needs and provide support. Through this significant outreach and partnership, we have seen that there are students re-engaging slowly who were disconnected earlier during the school closure.

As of Monday, May 11, 2020, in Brown County, there were 1,924 positive cases of COVID-19 and 18 deaths. Sadly, since the local outbreak, we have received correspondence from families that have magnified the inequities that some of our children are facing. We are aware of many families directly impacted. A mother of several children who attend school at the elementary, middle and high school levels sent an email apologizing for her children being disconnected from school, while she was hospitalized with COVID-19.

As we plan forward for the summer and fall, we have taken the lessons we've learned and are creating a fluid educational ecosystem that will be responsive to the individual learning as well as social and emotional needs of our students, while taking into account the current reality as we fight to stop the spread of COVID-19.

I am MOST PROUD to be part of such an extraordinary team of educators not only in Green Bay but across the state who comprise Wisconsin's great public education system. Together, we are ensuring that

we will do whatever it takes to provide all students with a continuity of learning while putting into place the necessary supports to ensure their safety, physical as well as social and emotional well being. In the words of Vince Lombardi, “The measure of who we are is what we do with what we have.”

Finally, in closing, I invite you to visit our Coronavirus website often for the latest updates. In addition, I welcome hearing your thoughts and concerns as well as solutions! As most are aware, I believe strongly that the success of Wisconsin’s workforce of tomorrow is predicated on our investment in students being well-served in public education today.

During this unprecedented public health emergency, we are often reminded of stories where people have persevered together through hard times, enduring pain and suffering while sacrificing for the greater good. We are better because of their contributions. Going forward, we now have an opportunity to address the inequities that have become so pronounced during this pandemic.

I am confident that together, working forward in the best interests of ALL children, we can address issues of inequity to access virtual learning and support services that will best meet the needs of ALL students and families as we lead through this unprecedented public health emergency.

Thank you for your service to the children, families and community. Thank you also for listening. We are in this together, and we will be measured by what we do with what we have.

Please stay safe and well,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Langenfeld Ed.D." The signature is written in a cursive style.

Michelle Langenfeld, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools and Learning

