

October 30, 2020

To the Gibraltar Area School District Board of Education:

We employees of Gibraltar Area Schools empathize with our students and their families. We understand that having students at home learning is difficult for some and inconvenient for others. Students miss socializing, the arts, and sports, and they are nostalgic for the days of normalcy. We are too. As a staff, we also want our students to return to school, however, at a time that is safe for everyone.

Students and their families may not have considered how “in person” school will function. They will sit at a desk, sometimes for three and a half hours with very little freedom of movement, and have to distance themselves from their peers and teachers. They will not be allowed to share equipment in physical education, play instruments, or sing as they normally would. They will not be able to conspire, rough house, or share intimate moments. It will be different school; it will be online school, in person.

We have led the Door County school districts with an astute and flexible plan; its strength reveals itself in that our school community has not contributed to the increasing numbers of cases in the county. The current plan is based on science and logic and it does work, for when students attend and engage in class, they achieve success. We witness it working each day in our interactions with students. If there are problems with this plan, let's work together as a community and seek solutions.

We encourage the Board of Education to course correct wisely. COVID-19 numbers are at all time high in Door County. We plaintively appeal to you that we wait until after the holidays, after the family gatherings, after holiday vacations. When the COVID-19 counts begin to subside, we can allow limited numbers of students in the building.

We care about our school and this community; we want a voice in making changes. Any change in this plan should include staff input for proposed solutions, as we are the people who will implement policies. Should the current model change, we would like the board to consider some potential issues. Will all course areas be treated the same? Many courses are highly specialized. What works for one subject may not work for another. What will happen with staff coverage if there is an outbreak? The pool for substitutes is quite shallow, and many of our dedicated substitute teachers are aged or may have health risks. Teachers who need to quarantine are currently conducting classes from home. If students are back in school, someone would need to cover classes. Our students deserve the highest amount of support. If coverage becomes an issue, the administration may take support staff to cover classes, leaving students with special needs unattended. We have several teaching staff with planned leave for maternity and upcoming surgery; some of these people do not yet have dedicated substitutes for their leave. Have the logistics of lunches, bussing, and changing classes been fully ironed out? Please address these questions before changing the current, successful plan.

Gibraltar Area Schools has always led the way in Door County, and we continue to lead now. Our administration created the current plan by consulting scientific data, listening to public health professionals, and following principles of logic. Aren't these the actions that we indoctrinate in our students each day? Now is not the time to follow; let's continue to lead the way in Door County in safety, ingenuity, and commitment to community.

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