



WINTER EDITION 2020-2021

CHEESEMAKER PRIDE

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF MONROE

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER

925 16TH AVENUE SUITE 3
MONROE, WI 53566
608-328-7171

ABRAHAM LINCOLN ELEMENTARY

2625 14TH AVENUE
MONROE, WI 53566
608-328-7172

NORTHSIDE ELEMENTARY

3005 8 1/2 STREET
MONROE, WI 53566
608-328-7134

PARKSIDE ELEMENTARY

920 4TH STREET
MONROE, WI 53566
608-328-7130

MONROE MIDDLE SCHOOL

1510 13TH STREET
MONROE, WI 53566
608-328-7120

MONROE HIGH SCHOOL

1600 26TH STREET
MONROE, WI 53566
608-328-7122

MONROE PUBLIC LIBRARY

925 16TH AVENUE
MONROE, WI 53566
608-328-7010

WWW.MONROESCHOOLS.COM

MISSION STATEMENT

The School District of Monroe will prepare each student for the future by developing academic, life, and employability skills. To this end, we will foster partnerships with family and community to ensure student success.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED: OPERATING SCHOOLS DURING A PANDEMIC



Rick Waski
District Administrator

The COVID-19 pandemic has been an experience that has impacted all of our lives in varied and personal ways. Not only has it affected people's health, but it has also changed aspects of our lives in ways that as little as a year ago we would have had trouble imagining. Regardless of how much of a threat people feel COVID-19 really is, we can all agree that its impact on our lives has been substantial and will likely be far-reaching for years to come.

During the spring and summer of 2020, our district began planning for a school year where we would have local control regarding the level to which our schools are open for in-person instruction, rather than that being determined at a state level. We worked tirelessly to develop plans that we hoped would allow us as much face-to-face instruction as possible while attempting to protect the health of our students, staff, and community.

During the first three months of school, we have learned a great deal. We have affirmed that we made some really good planning decisions, at the same time, there are some scenarios that have played out that we didn't anticipate. Here are some of our takeaways from the first three months of school:

There is no winning formula - As many of you may know, the district has three operational phases and families are also able to choose entirely virtual programming. As the individual the Board has designated to make the weekly decisions regarding our operational status, I quickly learned that people are so polarized on how serious COVID-19 is (or is not) that it is hard to find a middle ground that satisfies a majority of our parents. It became apparent to me by the start of October that we need to place our highest priority in the decision-making process on the COVID-19 activity in our schools as we have found that it does not necessarily match the activity levels in our community or the state. This has seemed to help us operate in Plan B (half capacity) as much as possible, yet has allowed us to be responsive to the health and safety conditions in our schools.

Hybrid does help - While I will be the first to acknowledge that hybrid instruction (teaching students virtually and in-person at the same time) is exhausting for teachers, it does help us keep our schools "open". There have been many occurrences this year where a student tested positive and began showing symptoms when they were in their virtual week, while the district was in Plan B. What this means is that we saved many students and staff from being exposed to the virus and were able to keep students present for face-to-face instruction that would have otherwise been quarantined. Additionally, we cannot keep 6 feet of physical distance between students and staff when we operate at full capacity. We are committed to returning to full capacity when we are at medium or low COVID-19 activity levels in the county and our case numbers in school are low, however, until we get there, hybrid does allow us to see our students, address their socioemotional needs, and check in on their physical and mental health.

What We Have Learned... (continued on page 2)

What We Have Learned... (continued from page 1)

It's the quarantines, not positive cases, that shut us down - I like many others, was under the false impression that once we had a case or two of COVID-19 in our schools that the transmission of the virus would quickly shut us down and the number of active cases among students and staff would skyrocket. That has not been the case. At the time this article was written, only 7% of the cases of COVID-19 we have had in schools were from transmission in the schools (3 people) and the rest of the cases resulted from spread outside of the schools. This suggests two things. First of all, it indicates that the preventative measures we are employing are working. Secondly, it admittedly suggests that student to student or student to staff transmission can be mitigated to the point where face-to-face instruction can occur. When we have had to go to Plan C, it has been because we have had to quarantine such a high number of staff for 14 days that we have not been able to staff our building.

In previous years, we could usually come up with the 30 to 35 substitute teachers we needed district-wide to cover 200 full-time teachers. This year, many of our substitutes have chosen not to work or have taken other jobs and that number has been reduced to about 15 people district-wide. In the 8 Plan changes we had in the district from the first day of school until this article was written, 7 of them were because of staffing, not public health conditions.

There is a long year ahead and I believe that COVID-19 will also have an impact on the 2021-2022 school year in ways that we have not experienced yet. It is my goal to make responsible decisions based on the data that we have, and for our district to be as effective as possible in communicating with our parents and community. There are so many things that we, as a community, love about our schools that are absent or substantially altered during the 2020-2021 school year. At the same time, I am proud of the flexibility of our students and families, the heroic efforts of our staff, and the support of our Board of Education in allowing us to simply do the best we can working through something we never have dealt with on this large of a scale before.

I wish you health and happiness this Holiday season and GO CHEESEMAKERS!!

PROTECTING STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC



Joe Monroe
Director of Pupil Services

COVID-19 has created a world that is complex, scary, polarized, and overwhelming for adults and children alike. Coronavirus, pandemic, outbreak, cluster, social distancing, vaccines, asymptomatic, superspreader, and transmission are just some of the new words that have entered our daily lives. The pandemic has presented new stressors that have impacted how our children see and feel about the world around them, and it is our job as educators to provide the support necessary to help them navigate this experience in a healthy and safe manner.

Unfortunately, the global pandemic has limited our ability to monitor and support the mental health of our students. Much of this can be attributed to the loss of nonverbal communication. Think about it, if 70-90% of what we communicate is provided through facial expressions and gestures, how do we communicate warmth, safety and care during a pandemic? Face coverings cover facial expressions when in-person learning is available, and online learning doesn't afford teachers the ability to hug our little ones or give fist-bumps to our older students. The ability to connect with students through caring words and warm nonverbal gestures is what makes our students feel safe and comfortable when in school. While our teachers are putting forth an incredible effort to communicate care, it seems to fall short when delivered through a face mask or computer monitor.

As a result, the School District of Monroe is carefully monitoring and supporting the mental health of our students. Examples of this work include:

- **Social-emotional learning** has been incorporated into every school this year to create a developmentally appropriate self-awareness and instill resilience skills within our students.
- **Relationship mapping** was conducted at every school to identify students that do not have a strong relationship with a positive adult at school. Those that don't are assigned a mentor or advisor to develop a connection that will provide care and support throughout the school year.
- **Engagement monitoring teams** have been implemented at each school. These teams employ administrators, school counselors, and school psychologists that track student attendance, participation, work completion, grades and other data points to identify those that may need more help. Student needs are then prioritized based on the severity of need, and plans are developed to address the concerns.
- The **School Based Mental Health Program** has continued to connect the most at-risk students with qualified community mental health providers. This has provided great support to children and families that previously would not have had access to this level of care.

Protecting Student Mental Health... (continued on page 3)

Protecting Student Mental Health... (continued from page 2)

The data obtained from the recent administration of the Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BESS) to students in grades 4-12 suggests that the above mentioned efforts have been effective. Students currently appear to be no more at-risk during this unusual school year than they have been in previous years. This is not to suggest that these concerns aren't real, but instead, that the efforts of our educators are addressing these issues in a successful manner.

	October 2018	October 2019	October 2020
Percentage of Students-Normal Risk	81%	83%	83%
Percentage of Students-Elevated Risk	13%	12%	12%
Percentage of Students-Extremely Elevated Risk	6%	5%	5%

While we are pleased about the current data, we know that we cannot afford to lose focus on the needs of our students. The District will continue to monitor the social and emotional health of our kids and we encourage parents to do the same. Providing extra time and care for the emotional needs of your children should be a priority for parents during this difficult time. Below are 10 tips to consider building into your daily interactions with your child:

1. Inform your child about COVID-19 in a developmentally appropriate way.
2. Answer questions about the pandemic simply and honestly.
3. Recognize and acknowledge your child's feelings.
4. Model how to manage your feelings in an appropriate way.
5. Stay busy and create a routine that creates a sense of predictability.
6. Get outside and exercise in a safe manner.
7. Avoid overuse of technology and monitor screen time.
8. Take care of yourself as a parent.
9. Know when to ask for help. Whether it be from a friend, the school or a professional in the community.
10. Most importantly, be more explicit about your love for your child. More hugs always help!

If you have any questions, concerns or feedback, please feel free to contact me via email at josephmonroe@monroe.k12.wi.us or by calling me directly at 608-328-7155. Thank you for your continued support and patience as we work through this unpredictable and unprecedented situation.



CURRICULUM UPDATE: PLC WORK



Terri Montgomery
Director of Curriculum
& Instruction

“A guaranteed and viable curriculum is the single most important initiative a school or district can engage in to raise student achievement.”
- “What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Practice,”
Marzano, 2003

Over the past three years, the district has been working hard to put together Course Overviews for every subject and grade level at the School District of Monroe. Course overviews are the bedrock of a guaranteed and viable curriculum which has been a goal of the district since we began our Professional Learning Collaboration (PLC) journey 6 years ago. I bet you're asking yourself, “What is a course overview?” A course overview gives parents, students, and teachers the necessary information about skills students need to be able to complete successfully in that particular course or subject. Course overviews contain **Mastery Standards, Essential Questions, and Learning Targets**; these three things are what make course overviews important. Standards are the big ideas of what students need to know, Essential Questions are the overarching questions that can be asked at any time and the answer can be different at any time, and Learning Targets are skills embedded in a standard that need to be mastered.

The teachers and administration spent many Mondays during our PLC time working on the construction of these course overviews. This journey began over three years ago with professional development on what a course overview looks like and laying out a timeline for the completion of course overviews so we could have them ready to publish on our district website by September of 2020.

The 2017-2018 school year was the beginning of our course overview work where teachers received professional development on course overviews and how it related to our PLC work. Staff was also given professional development on how to determine a mastery standard. Three factors are the basis for choosing mastery standards: endurance, leverage, and readiness.

Endurance - *Will this standard or benchmark provide students with knowledge that is of value beyond a single test?* **Ex: Students learn to use context clues to determine the meaning of unknown words. This skill is used for the rest of their life.**

Leverage - *Will this standard or benchmark provide students with knowledge that is of value in multiple disciplines?* **Ex: Students learn how to read graphs in math and can apply this in science.**

Readiness - *Will this standard or benchmark provide students with knowledge that is required for the next level of learning?* **Ex: Logarithms are taught in math because students will need to know how to use and interpret them in higher-level classes like chemistry.**

Teachers worked tirelessly to determine what standards met these three criteria.

2018-2019 brought a focus on essential questions. I am guessing you're asking yourself “What is an essential question?” An essential question is:

1. Open-ended; that is, it typically will not have a single, final, and correct answer.
2. Thought-provoking and intellectually engaging, often sparking discussion and debate.
3. Calls for higher-order thinking, such as analysis, inference, evaluation, prediction. It cannot be effectively answered by recall alone.
4. Points toward important, transferable ideas within (and sometimes across) disciplines.
5. Raises additional questions and sparks further inquiry.
6. Requires support and justification, not just an answer.
7. Recurs over time; that is, the question can and should be revisited again and again.

2019-2020 was the year of completion for our course overviews. Teachers received professional development on writing student-friendly learning targets. The following are characteristics of a student-friendly learning target:

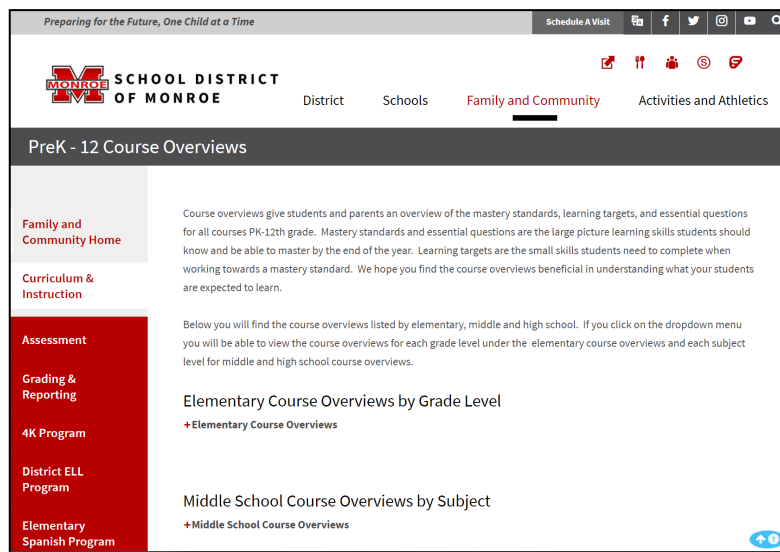
1. A learning target is student-friendly.
2. Learning targets are shared with students.
3. Learning targets are “I...” statements.
4. A learning target uses pictures, words, actions, or a combination of all three.
5. Learning targets are small, focused, and intended to be practiced within a given lesson.
6. When you have a learning target that students can see, they can direct their efforts toward the target.
7. Learning targets also serve adults in planning, monitoring, and assessing the quality of learning for ALL students.

Curriculum Update... (continued on page 5)

Curriculum Update...(continued from page 4)

This work is a culmination of 3 years, much was accomplished on early release Mondays, and many more hours were spent outside of this time to complete this body of work. It didn't always go smoothly as we had a lot of snow days in the 2018-2019 school year which hindered teachers' work completion on the essential questions in a timely manner. The deadline for the essential questions was extended, but the deadline for the course overviews remained the same. Today you can view the course overviews at our website www.monroeschools.com by first clicking on the Family and Community tab, then the Curriculum and Instruction tab. There you will find the course overviews for grades 4K-12.

Please visit www.MonroeSchools.com
for more information



DISTRICT LEVY RATE LOWEST IN DECADES



Ron Olson
Business
Administrator

The fall newsletter articles from me and from most business administrators across the state who do them are typically about the finalization of the budget and levy for the coming year. In the past few years, I've deviated to discuss facility needs, safety grants, and potential referendums. This year the majority of the newsletter is focused on how the District is dealing with education during the pandemic. I will try to bring some normalcy and tradition to this article and again focus on the budget and levy rather than another article on all the things we work with daily to deal with the pandemic and keeping our students and staff safe. However, even in the budget, you will see that the pandemic is having an impact there.

The biggest and best news that came out of the annual meeting and subsequent finalization of the budget and levy by the Board of Education at the end of October was that our levy mill rate is the lowest it has been in over 35 years. I can track the District levy back to 1984-85. I know levy rates in Wisconsin were historically higher in the 70s and early 80s so I am guessing it may be the lowest for even quite a few more than 35 years. The levy rate of \$9.79/thousand of valuation is only the fourth time the District mill rate has been less than \$10 in that time. One of those other times was last year with the other two being in the mid-90s.

The proposed Fund 10 budget, the District's general fund, has a budgeted deficit of \$1.4M which is significant. However, in a normal year the District operates with a budget deficit in the \$500,000-700,000 range and then relies on bringing expenditures in 1-3% under budget over the course of the year to allow for nearly balanced ending revenues and expenditures by year-end. This year though we also had new budgeted expenditures of \$1M to address costs related to the pandemic while currently only \$245,000 of assistance is expected to be received from the federal government. There is hope that additional federal relief may be adopted. If not, the District will have to utilize some of its fund balance. The primary purpose of the District fund balance is to cover costs and avoid short term cashflow borrowing interest costs due to revenues coming in later in the year than expenditures occur. The other purpose of fund balance is to deal with significant, unexpected items that may come up on a rare occasion. I think we all agree that the pandemic meets that definition. We also all hope that it is a rare occurrence!

Fund 10 revenues for 2020-21 were approved at \$30,597,444, a 1.5% increase from the previous year, with over half of that being the \$245,000 of federal aid for COVID relief. Revenues have remained relatively flat over the last 10 years as any allowed increases by the state have often been offset by a slight decline in enrollment over that time. Expenditures were approved at \$31,999,414, a 7.8% increase. This includes the \$1M related to pandemic expenditures for technology devices and software for facilitating remote instruction across all grade levels. It also includes costs for personal protective equipment (PPE), cleaning materials and equipment, additional nursing time, and other non-technology costs related to administering virtual instruction. Part of the increase is also due to the fact that the 2019-20 ending expenditures that the increase is based on were lower than expected due to the shutdown in the spring and related savings. Many of the needs we identified in the spring didn't have the items and costs come in until after the July 1 start of a new fiscal year. The District levy was set at \$12,374,783, a 2.24% increase. District property valuations increase 3.5% to \$1,264,124,667 which resulted in the 1.21% reduction in the levy rate to \$9.79/thousand.

We know there are uncertainties that lie ahead with the pandemic, but we hope the budget developed will be able to cover many of the unexpected costs that may arise. If we are forced into another prolonged virtual situation, there may be some areas where we might save costs. There is also the possibility of additional federal funding to help. All-in-all we are comfortable with where the District budget is for this year. We have concerns and reservations about what the long-term effect of the pandemic might have on the state economy, the state's other budget needs, and how that might impact school funding and our District budget for 2021-22 and 2022-23 when the next biennial state budget is approved next spring/summer.

INCLEMENT WEATHER AND SCHOOLS FOR THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR



Rick Waski
District Administrator

There will be inclement weather this year, just like there is every winter. However, the way this inclement weather affects our school will change this year, and may change in the future as a result of this pandemic.

Our teaching staff will be working from home on these days, planning and preparing lessons that can be viewed at any time of the day. Students are encouraged to complete the lessons on these days, however, they can also complete the lessons later, on their own time, if families choose other activities for the day. Our teaching staff will also use this time to participate in professional development activities.

Inclement weather does not always arrive at convenient times. As a result, we still may have early release days. We plan to release 2 hours early when early releases are necessary. This means that each school will release its students 2 hours earlier than their normal release times and buses will likely arrive at homes and bus stops 2 or more hours early depending on road conditions.

We have decided not to have late start days this year. Days that previously might have been late start days will more resemble the inclement weather days described previously in this article.

We still intend to send automated calls, emails, and text messages to families and staff when we are having an inclement weather day. We also will contact television stations and radio stations so families know that buses are not running and the schools are not in session for face-to-face instruction. We will follow the same procedures for early releases.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed many aspects of our daily lives and how we handle inclement weather events is not different. We will see if any of the changes we make this year extend beyond the 2020-2021 school year. At this point, we simply are establishing procedures we feel make the most sense for our students, staff, and families as we work through the constant uncertainty we have faced throughout the year.

School Closings and Early Dismissals

The School District of Monroe's school closing information is posted to the district webpage and district Facebook page minutes after a decision to close or dismiss early is made. Parents and guardians of current students will also receive an automated phone call from our Skylert messaging system.

The district contacts the following TV and radio stations when these events occur:

RADIO

WBGR FM 93.7 (Monroe)
WEKZ FM 95.5/AM 1260 (Monroe)

TELEVISION

WISC CBS 3 (Madison)
WMTV NBC 15 (Madison)
WKOW ABC 27 (Madison)



JOIN OUR TEAM

www.MonroeSchools.com

#CHEESEMAKERPRIDE

INTERESTED IN SUBSTITUTE TEACHING OR IN A SUPPORT ROLE?

The School District of Monroe is always looking for individuals to substitute in our schools for both our teaching staff and in support roles. If you have an associates degree or higher from an accredited college or university and have successfully completed an approved substitute training program then you can apply! You do not need a degree in Education. The pay is \$120 a day and the rate increases to over \$200 a day if you spend 10 or more consecutive school days in the same assignment. There is a brief online training required. The school district will give you the information needed to do the training and we will reimburse your class fee of \$39.95 and your sub-license fee of \$125.00 once you have subbed for us at least 10 times.

For those interested in substitute positions for aides, secretaries, custodians, and food service a high school diploma or GED is required. The pay is \$15.62 an hour. Please contact Elizabeth Babel at 608-328-7236 or email at elizabethbabel@monroe.k12.wi.us for more information on how apply.

PROVIDING STUDENT MEALS IN A PANDEMIC



Eric Ekum
Director of Food Service

The School District of Monroe Food Service Department has been fortunate enough to continue providing meals to our students during these unprecedented times. Through the USDA, we are able to offer all students free breakfast and lunch for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year. While we continue to provide meals in our schools when they are in session, we have also created a Virtual Meal Pick-up Program to provide meals daily for our students who are learning virtually.

VIRTUAL MEAL PICK-UP

The Virtual Meal Pick-Up program is available Monday-Friday and provides free breakfast and lunch to students learning virtually and those participating in Plan H (year-round virtual). When the District is in Plan B (virtual/in-person hybrid), families may pick up meals for their students learning virtually, while students learning in-school can receive hot lunch in their school cafeteria. When our schools are in Plan C (all virtual), our Food Service team prepares daily meals for all families who have signed up for the Virtual Meal Pick-Up program. Most recently when all of our schools were in Plan C, we were able to provide 329 students with daily meals.

FOOD SERVICE MEALS

All meals served at the School District of Monroe, whether through our cafeterias or Virtual Meal Pick-up program, are prepared according to the USDA guidelines. All breakfast meals contain 1 cup of fruit and/or juice, 2oz of whole-grain (equivalent), and 8oz of milk. All lunch meals contain 1 cup of fruit, 1 cup of vegetables, 2oz of whole-grain (equivalent), 2oz of meat (equivalent), and 8oz of milk. Both our Virtual Meal and in-person cafeteria menus are available on the School District website at www.monroeschools.com. Select the red fork and spoon icon in the upper right-hand corner of the page to be taken to the Food Service portion of the website. Click on Menus and scroll down towards the bottom of the page where you will see menus listed by month for breakfast, lunch, and virtual meals. Our Virtual Meals are available for pick-up at the Alternative Charter School Building located at 1220 16th Ave door #7, Monday-Friday 6:00am-12:00pm and 3:00pm-5:30pm (excluding holidays). Curbside service is available by calling 608-328-7288 upon arrival.

We also offer a weekly pick-up option, by request, for families who are unable to pick up meals daily. If you would like to sign up for the Virtual Meal Program or have any specific questions, please contact me at 608-328-7260 or ericekum@monroe.k12.wi.us or reach out to Elizabeth Babel at 608-328-7236 or elizabethbabel@monroe.k12.wi.us.

Thank you to our amazing Food Service Staff for providing meals for our students and their continuous hard work and dedication!



Back Row, L left to Right: Rich Deprez, Dan Barthoff, Mary Berger, Tim Wolff, Dylan McGuire
Front Row, Left to Right: Teresa Keehn, Nikki Matley, Jim Plourde, Cheryl McGuire

The Board of Education meets on the 2nd and 4th Monday of each month at 7pm.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing requirements, and other safety precautions, meetings are being held virtually at this time.

Please visit our website at www.MonroeSchools.com to access the public link for these meetings.

In the future, when appropriate, meetings will once again be at the District Administrative Center on the 3rd Floor of the Monroe Public Library.

SCHOOL BOARD ELECTION NOTICE

The School District of Monroe will hold its annual School Board Election on April 6th, 2021.

All incumbents not seeking re-election must file their written notification by 5:00pm on December 28th, 2020.

Three seats will be open for the April 2021 Election. Any Monroe School District resident wishing to run for a seat on the Board of Education must file their candidacy papers by 5:00pm on Thursday, January, 2nd, 2021.

Candidacy papers may be picked up and turned in at the District Administrative Center, 925 16th Avenue, Suite 3 (third floor of the Monroe Public Library).



SCHOOL DISTRICT OF MONROE

925 16TH AVENUE SUITE 3
MONROE, WI 53566

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SCHOOL DISTRICT OF MONROE CALENDAR

Thursday, December 24 to
Friday, January 1, 2021

No School—Winter Break

March 29th-April 3rd, 2021

Spring Break



Visit our District Calendar at www.MonroeSchools.com
for up-to date information on upcoming events.



ATTENTION NON-RESIDENTS OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF MONROE

This newsletter is provided to all residents of the School District of Monroe. The most affordable process used to circulate this newsletter throughout the district is to use saturation mailing. It is costly to avoid a few non-residents from receiving our newsletter. We apologize for your inconvenience but wish to provide important information to all residents. Thank you.