

As the Superintendent and K-12 Principal of a small public school in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan my world drastically changed late on the night of Thursday, March 12th. Around 11:00 p.m., Governor Whitmer declared that due to COVID-19 all school buildings in Michigan would be closing beginning on Monday, March 16th. This eleventh hour declaration put our world into a frenzy. Teachers spent much of the day on Friday the 13th putting together packets for what we thought would be an extended spring break. On March 17th, schools were told to cease all student activities including coursework and enrichment activities since we could not guarantee that all students have access to appropriate learning devices or access to the internet or the support needed. On March 23rd, Governor Whitmer declared, through Executive Order, that schools in Michigan would be closed until April 13th. On April 2nd, schools were suspended for the rest of the school year and districts were ordered to develop a Continuity of Learning Plan. The District Plan needed to include:

- A method to provide alternate modes of instruction.
- A method to keep pupils at the center of educational activities.
- A description to manage and monitor student learning.
- A description how the administration, school board, and teachers collaborated in development of plan.
- A description of how district will notify pupils and parents of the plan.
- A method to provide or arrange for food distribution to eligible pupils.
- Continue to pay school employees.
- A method to evaluate the participation by pupils.
- A method or provide mental health support to pupils.

Were these plans perfect? Of course not. Did school leaders, teachers, support staff, and school boards do everything that they could to meet the needs of students and families? Absolutely. Please go back and read those bullets again and look at the time frame. We did all those things!

That brings us to now. After nearly two months of being shut down the state has little revenue coming in. There is a \$1.25 billion deficit in the State School Aid fund for the current school year and a \$1.14 billion deficit projected for the 2020-2021 School Aid fund. \$1 billion dollars equals a cut of \$685 per student in Michigan. State Senator Wayne Schmidt, the Chair of the Senate's Education Budget Subcommittee, has recently warned of a potential 25% cut in state funding. That's approximately \$2,000 per student or about \$700,000 of the \$2,716,428 in state revenue that Superior Central receives. We have already trimmed all excess from our budget. What's left? Transportation, athletics, heat, 35-40 kids in classrooms?

The federal government, through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, has given \$13.2 Billion to the state educational agencies throughout the country. This money will be awarded to districts, next year, in the same proportions as each state receives its Title I, Part A dollars. Michigan schools will see about \$350,000,000 in ESSER dollars. Based on the Title I, Part A formula, Superior Central will receive \$52,921 or \$155 per pupil. While this federal relief is appreciated, you can see that it in no way makes up for the cuts that are coming. I would like to point out that the 13 brick and mortar schools that make up the Marquette-Alger Regional Educational Service Agency (MARESA) will receive a total of \$1,169,161 while 5 Virtual schools from around the state will receive \$2,531,522. I'm not sure what changed for virtual schools to warrant such relief. They don't have to transport kids in a 229 square mile district.

This morning I sat at the island in my kitchen and poured myself a bowl of Frosted Flakes. On the box I was encouraged to upload my receipt to "trigger a \$1 donation to Mission Tiger" to help save school sports. I thought to myself, what other organizations have to cut "box tops" or save "soup labels" to

turn in for extra funds? I've never had to scan my receipt so that the airlines can get an extra dollar, so I don't have to pay for a second bag. I've never peeled a soup label to help save banks. So, my question is, why do schools have to? I'm tired of schools just being expected to do what we can with whatever we are given.

Schools have always been important to Americans. Our school prides itself on being the heart of our community. Our community, like many others, fully supports our school. Community members show up for basketball games long after their kids have graduated. Grandparents, aunts and uncles love watching their youngsters perform in the Christmas concerts and the Spring Sing. Why then are schools the first to always take the financial hit? If you care about public schools, I encourage you to contact your state legislators and tell them that they must protect the school aid fund in Michigan. Tell them that during these times, if schools are expected to be "online" we will need more flexibility in how we "count kids" and are funded. Contact your federal members of Congress and let them know that schools need flexibility with money that comes from the federal government.

Teachers already pay hundreds of dollars out of their own pockets for classroom supplies. Extra-curricular activities like Science Olympiad and Youth In Government fundraise every cent for their programs. Athletic coaches and players are asked to participate in fundraisers to support their sports. We sell pizza and bagels to help fund our school's social worker. Schools do so much, for so many. Unfortunately, there isn't a pasty fundraiser out there that will be able to fully fund our public schools. It's up to our elected officials to stop stealing from our future generations.

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