

Blaise's Testimony (Following Dr. Weiss) 6/24/2020  
Assembly Education Committee

I echo Dr. Weiss's comments, the events in March and every day since have been a struggle to do what is best for our stakeholders while trying to navigate the pandemic. Dr. Weiss mentioned how our stakeholders are coming together now and throughout the next few weeks to figure out the South Milwaukee way forward for this fall. Our staff is committed to providing the best possible experience for all of our stakeholders while maintaining a level of safety.

In South Milwaukee we created rotations of School Nutrition Staff that safely provided over 30,000 meals to our families since the pandemic began. When it was clear that school would not resume this spring, we immediately set in motion our deferred maintenance plans that would normally impact instruction. This includes things such as renovating a 1960's foods classroom, which entails asbestos abatement, reworking power and HVAC components and updating the mill work and appliances. This includes repaving asphalt playground areas, tennis courts, and high flow traffic areas that were in great need of repair, however finding the best time always eluded us given the demand on the areas and scheduling.

We saved money where we could, however, the intent of South Milwaukee was to lighten the load on the economy not make it worse. We did not lay anyone off, even though there were arguments made that some would make more if they were laid off. We took the route of keeping everyone working either remotely or on site. It was tough to change the method of service delivery, however it was required given the pandemic. We kept our cleaning and maintenance employees on staff and started deep cleaning and doing repairs that we couldn't get to before due to instruction and labor constraints. South Milwaukee stepped up to be good stewards of our resources and made sure not to place additional burden on the Federal Government or hinder the economy. With this in mind, I come to you today to convey my anxiety over having a budget repair bill come down the pike that will require us to lay off the staff that are showing high levels of commitment to our stakeholders during this pandemic. Our state needs to speak with one voice and submit a request to our Federal government for COVID-19 federal assistance to stabilize the Wisconsin budget and bridge the gap from the economic crisis caused by COVID-19 and the full power of our rebounding economy.