

GUEST OPINION

Virus isn't breaking all community bonds

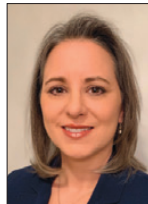
Pandemic offers lessons amid challenges

By Jen Wimmer

"People who began a new job in the midst of a pandemic" is most likely a select club of which I am a proud member. As I reflect on the first six months of my tenure as superintendent of the West Bend School District, I remain honored to be chosen to lead this district and I am certainly very happy to be here and look forward to a bright future for the West Bend School District.

My first task after joining this school district was to work collaboratively to create and implement a plan to reopen our school buildings for in-person learning five days a week and establish a full-time virtual school for grades K-12. For our school buildings, our focus included implementing mitigation efforts to prevent spread of the virus in our schools and communities while also continuing a high level of instruction in the midst of those efforts.

The success which the West Bend School District and other schools in the area have had with in-person instruction this school year could not have been possible without the guidance and support from the Washington Ozaukee Public Health Department. Everyone at the department has been a strong guiding force to assist us



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in this new mode of operation. Most of all, our students have been resilient and they have been engaged in learning. Of course, time cannot stand still for them as they move forward with their learning and their activities as they pursue their dreams and goals.

The school district doesn't stand still, either. Our efforts for continuous improvement remain in place as we moved ahead with year two of our focus on literacy instructional strategies in grades K-8 to improve reading and comprehension districtwide. We also moved forward with robust support services in social and emotional wellness and learning. In addition to more training for our staff through a Wisconsin Department of Justice grant, we will continue to provide students with ways to decrease emotional distress while offering them tools to have more positive attitudes toward oneself and others, as well as stronger confidence, persistence, and commitment to school.

Our experiences with the virtual learning environment have provided constructive lessons learned and avenues to follow in examining both short-term virtual learning such as

for snow days and a full-time virtual school as a viable option for families and students that desire that environment. We most likely experienced our last "snow day" as we will implement distance learning during inclement weather in the future.

Our future plans for the district include gaining community input this summer or fall to refine our vision for the future of education in the West Bend School District. This will include conversations and feedback related to safety, instruction, facilities, as well as other topics.

Thank you to our students, staff, families and communities for the warm welcome. While in many cases this was over a video meeting, I look forward to expanding my community activities after the pandemic is over so I can also frequently share the great things taking place at the West Bend School District. When we can welcome large numbers of guests to our schools again, I hope to see many community members at concerts, plays, and athletic events. Our students have much talent to share and our dedicated staff are proud to support their accomplishments. Thank you for your support of the West Bend School District.

(Jen Wimmer is superintendent of the West Bend School District.)