

BULLDOG BARK



August 2020

ReConnect Meetings: Are We Meeting Our Students' Needs?

Last Fall, Peshtigo School District sponsored a city-wide public "Connect" event which brought together public educators, parents, business representatives and others interested in improving our community and school district. The turnout was phenomenal and we received some great feedback on what we're doing well and what we can improve upon. Follow up focus groups have met recently to continue this important discussion. Small groups of community members came in at staggered times to provide more feedback for the Board, administration, and Performance Services.

We were happy to learn that the community supports our education initiatives and the high expectations we have. Connect participants also noticed our increased communication efforts. We are proud to be fiscally responsible in our district and to be student driven. It was discussed that property values are higher here because of our school system. Our district would grow if we had more housing. It's tough to buy property in the Peshtigo School District!

Concerns were raised about our lack of space for all of our classrooms. With more classrooms we could offer more class offerings and continue to grow. An auditorium and improved athletic facilities would be a greater draw to the Tri-City region and support our school and community as a whole.

More career readiness programming is wanted. Desire for more manufacturing, automotive, and agricultural education was brought up by many participants.

Soon, Performance Services will share the building study results with the Board and we will discuss the highlights in our next month's newsletter. Board President Mariel Carter states, "It was a privilege to talk openly with community members, parents, teachers, and students as we identified areas in which the Peshtigo School District is doing well and advocated for changes to address new and upcoming needs of our students. I am looking forward to Re-Connect in September to show how the school has implemented the first phase of ideas generated during the original Connect event." Everyone in the community will be invited to attend our ReConnect event on **September 16th**. Mark your calendar!

Forward Together Safe Reopening: We Hear You!

Five hundred and ten families responded to our parent survey, communicating wishes and concerns! Thank you for your support! We have had several in person and virtual parent and staff meetings to plan for reopening this fall. The ideas we have formed have been discussed in detail at the board level multiple times. "It's going to be different this year. It's not going to be just as normal", Mr. Rau stated at one of our planning meetings. We are referring to our reopening plan as "Forward Together".

A big concern of parents and staff is the emotional and social health of our young people. We know that kids need the support of friends and teachers which is stronger with in-person instruction but this must be thoughtfully implemented using family choice as a guiding principle. At this time, 140 students have chosen to start the school year virtually.

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Our Forward Together plan is based on choice, adaptability, safety, and determination to serve all students! We are going to set up classrooms for social distancing where possible. Wherever possible, we will space students out to reduce risk. We are going to ask teachers and students to wear masks at older ages and in settings like buses. Hand sanitizing will be encouraged. Mr. Rau has emphasized that our goal is "risk mitigation". The maintenance staff will be using an electrostatic cleaning system weekly. All hard surfaces will be cleaned daily. We are doing whatever is in our control to reduce the risk of covid exposure while trying to maintain as much normalcy in our new-normal environment!

Nine bottle refilling stations have been installed for students to use rather than traditional fountains and hand sanitizer dispensers have been added. Each morning all staff will be screened with no contact thermometers to lessen the chance of transmission. Board member Josh Seefeldt states, "Mr. Williams and his staff have been working very hard to make sure all the extra safety measures are in place. The main goal for us as a board and for administration is for students and staff to come back to the safest environment possible."

A large factor in having to move to virtual learning will be on the number of infections in our county and available hospital beds. Student and staff absentee rates will also be factors. We are worried about teachers and other staff like bus drivers being absent for multiple days. Mr. Rau is planning to announce details of our Forward Together reopening format, to help parents and teachers plan, on **August 5th**.

Student Spotlight: Everybody's in the Same Boat

We reached out to a Peshtigo student, Senior Emily Halfmann, for a student perspective on virtual school last spring and school restarting in August under the cloud of COVID. "I missed people! It was very different. I learned to appreciate in-person class better. I'll be excited to go back to regular in person school again!" Emily said that asking questions and interacting with fellow students was much tougher under distance learning. On a positive note, Emily discussed how the pandemic has allowed her to work more and spend more time with her family than her schedule would typically allow.

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Emily is going to be a senior this year and she is planning to attend college for musical theater. "It's been a little tricky to tour colleges during the pandemic", she said. Emily is considering UW-Stevens Point or possibly Carthage College.

Upon being asked for advice for teachers this fall Emily stated, "Oh boy! Everybody's in the same boat. Be patient with each other. I'm glad we're trying to make it as safe as possible for everyone." Great advice, Emily Halfmann! Together, we will do the best we can!



Pictured: Emily Halfmann, Student at Peshtigo Middle/High School

Athletics Programs Restart: Are We Ready for Fall Sports?

Fall sports safety protocols were established July ninth. Many safety procedures were put in place, including no weight room or locker room use. Coaches have been informed of detailed safety protocols to follow social distancing guidelines and limit contact and exposure.

WIAA voted on July twenty-third to delay the start of fall sports based on two categories: low risk and high risk of being infected with the coronavirus. High school cross country and swim are starting August 17th. Middle school cross country is starting August 24th. September 7th is the start date for volleyball, soccer, and football.

Both Mr. Rau and Mr. Wickman are in regular discussions with other school districts in our conference to coordinate athletics. Mr. Wickman emphasized, "We are looking at fall sports only at this time".

Building Improvements: What Will Be Different this Fall?

In the Peshtigo School District, we are always looking for ways to improve our learning environment. In both of our buildings, we have improved and updated the nurses' offices to reflect the current concerns regarding COVID-19 and safety. Offices have been remodeled so students can have direct access to our nurses directly from the hallway in each building. Mailroom space will also be converted to COVID quarantine space for students showing COVID symptoms to be isolated while awaiting pick-up.

Additional improvements are being made at the PELC. The PELC gym floor has been sanded down and refinished to help extend its life. Also, five classrooms are being refurbished by replacing ceiling tile and flooring and adding more power outlets and sound insulation. In addition, new dimmable occupancy sensor LED light fixtures are being installed. Following fiscally conservative preventative maintenance to upgrade rooms at the PELC at a rate of five per summer will keep the PELC in great shape! Such improvements to the building will improve the learning environment for our elementary students here in Peshtigo.

The money saved in our Long Term Capital Improvement Fund, called Fund 46, allows us to be "proactive and plan for the future in a fiscally responsible manner", according to Finance Director Sarah Swanson. "I'm very comfortable that we will be able to maintain the PELC with the money we have saved for forty to fifty more years", stated Director of Buildings and Grounds Brian Williams. Having the community support to improve the PELC building has made a big difference in helping to meet the learning needs of our students.

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL: Monday, August 24

Next issue to include:

- *School Starting**
- *New Staff Introductions**
- *Meet Your Peshtigo School Board**
- *Facilities Study Results**