



Middleton–Cross Plains  
Area School District  
inclusive. innovative. inspiring.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**1. Who is Perry Hibner?** I am the Director of Communications for the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District. I joined the District in this role in 2011. Before that, I worked for more than 20 years at the Wisconsin State Journal as a news reporter, sports reporter, sports copy editor, sports designer and the assistant sports editor for the last 14 years I was there. I also have a teaching degree and previously taught high school social studies, government, history and journalism.

**2. What is the most updated information we have with regard to the concerns of COVID-19?** The state of Wisconsin closed all public and private K-12 schools in mid-March and through at least April 24. The safety measures, including social distancing, being recommended by health officials at the federal, state and local level appear to be helping flatten the curve. I think most of us expect this to continue for months.

**3. So schools have been closed since March 16, how does this impact students' learning?** In the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District, we made the decision right away that we were going to provide online instruction for all of our students. The question was when and how would it work. We decided we wanted to make sure staff, students and families had time to prepare for this huge shift so we didn't start until Wednesday, April 1.

Virtual learning looks different than traditional classroom learning. We have had to modify the length of the school day because no one would suggest it is good for children to be in front of a computer screen for 7 hours a day. At the elementary level, we are asking students to spend 40 minutes a day with teachers on reading, writing and literacy, and mathematics. They also get 30 minutes a day of encore instruction. Middle school students get 2 to 3 hours a day with their teachers in all of their subjects, while high school students get 3 to 4 hours a day with their teachers in all of their subjects.

**4. Do you have an idea as to when will students be able to come back to school?** We don't. Governor Evers' order goes until April 24. It could be lifted before then if conditions improve, but based on the current data and the expectation that Wisconsin won't hit its peak until April 17 we don't expect to return to school before April 24. The governor suggested in a recent phone interview that he plans to extend school closings at least through April. Many area superintendents are expecting schools to remain closed for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year. More than a fourth of all states have already closed schools for the remainder of the school year.

**5. What is the District doing to deliver or have meals available for students during the school closure?** On Tuesday, March 17, we started a meal distribution program where children ages 18 and younger can get a free breakfast and lunch each weekday from 11 a.m. to noon at one of nine sites around the District. We even were able to provide meals during spring break. We are now serving more than 300 meals a day and have served more than 8,000 in the first 19 days of the program. The program will continue to be offered while schools remain closed.

Our Weekend Food Program is also still going. During the school year, it provided healthy meals to approximately 190 students at our six elementary schools and Glacier Creek. Our community partners have expanded the program while schools are closed and are now providing 300 meals every Friday spread across the nine meal distribution sites. More bags are provided at the two sites where we have the most participation.

**6. Are there any resources available for those who do not have the internet at home?** We continue to try and get MiFi devices to our families who do not have internet access. When we did a survey a few years ago, we found that more than 95 percent of our 5,000-plus households had internet access. We have also let families know about free internet offerings from Charter and TDS for the next two months.

**7. The District has distributed Chromebooks to those students who didn't have a computer or device at home they could use for distance learning. Does the District have a plan as to when is the instruction via distance learning starting?** We offered three days when families could come to either our schools or the meal distribution sites and more than 2,500 Chromebooks were distributed to students. Our school social workers have also been reaching out to students whose families didn't sign up to get a device or weren't at any of those pick-up dates and delivered a device to them if needed. Our staff are also reaching out to students who aren't currently engaging in online learning to see what support they might need. As of this week, we feel like the number of students who don't have a device to do virtual learning is very small.

We began online instruction on Wednesday, April 1. The number of calls and emails I have received has decreased substantially this week as opposed to the first three days so anecdotally that would make it seem like things are going smoother. Our goal was to work out kinks and get students feeling comfortable the first couple of weeks. Go slow to go faster is our motto with a lot of things.

**8. What platforms will be used to deliver instruction to students?** We are using three different platforms depending on grade level. 4K through second-grade students are using Seesaw, which is an activities-based program. Third- and fourth-graders are using Google Classroom. Students in grades 5-12 are using BUZZ, which is very robust and allows us to monitor assignments, have multiple staff members checking in with students and has a lot of other features we felt would be useful for middle and high school students. It is also the program we use with our online school, which meant many of our staff members were already familiar with it so there wasn't as steep a learning curve.

**9. What are the expectations for students while receiving instruction via distance learning?** We want them to continue to be engaged in their learning. We want to provide the support they need. We want to make sure technology, whether it be a device or internet access, isn't a barrier for any student. We want to make sure we are realistic in our expectations as this is a new experience for the vast majority of our students and staff.

We have gone to a standards-based evaluation for elementary students for second semester. We have gone to a pass-no pass for middle and high school students for second semester. We hope that by moving away from letter grades it will ease some of the anxiety our students and families are already facing. In all likelihood, we will need to do remediation for all students once school buildings are reopened and that is perfectly fine.

**10. What are the expectations for families while students receive instruction via distance learning?** We realize no two family situations are identical. Some children will have an adult at home who can help them all the time, while others may have very little adult support. Some families may have devices for every child in their home, while others may be sharing devices so they are limited as to when they can do online instruction. Some families may have high-speed internet, while others may have broadband, which may mean that only one person at a time can be on the internet. And that doesn't even take into account that some adults are able to work from home while others are still essential and aren't at home.

As a public educational institution, it is our duty to make sure all students have the tools they need to succeed. And we must also realize with online instruction that barriers will make it harder for some students to succeed. We need to be understanding, patient and supportive.

**11. How are teachers going to monitor that students are in fact engaged and doing their work?** Our online platforms allow for staff to monitor how students are doing. We are also asking teachers to hold regular classroom hours where students and families can check in for help and support. We are also asking our support staff, who play such a crucial role in the success of students when schools are open, to also keep checking in with students to see what they need.

**12. Are students still having to take the STAR and Forward tests?** STAR testing was completed for high school students in the fall. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction announced a few weeks ago that school districts would not need to administer the Forward Exam in 2020 due to COVID-19. DPI has also said it will grant waivers to districts so they don't need to meet the minimum instructional hours requirements. Districts can also request a waiver so seniors don't have to take the Civics exam, which the state added a few years ago and is now a requirement to graduate. Everyone realizes this is a unique situation we are facing and it has been uplifting to see the flexibility from so many organizations.

**13. Is there one place I can send families to go on the District website for online instruction help?** On the front page of our District website, we have added a series of Quick Links for learning from home. It includes login pages to all of our platforms, resources for elementary students, and resources for high school students. We also have a COVID-19 page on the website where we keep all of the emails and other communications we have sent to families over the past month. We are certainly aware it is a lot of information, however, we would rather provide too much than too little right now. All of this can be found at [www.mcpcsd.k12.wi.us](http://www.mcpcsd.k12.wi.us)

**14. Are there any mental health resources that the District is providing for families and staff?** Counselors and student services staff at each of our schools have been reaching out to students and families to see what support they might need. We have also posted on the District website a number of community resources that are available. We have also posted on the District website information about mental health resources available. We certainly know if COVID-19 drags on for months that more efforts will need to take place.

**15. Is the District offering any mindfulness virtual opportunities?** Yes, our wellness department has been offering Q&As and breakout sessions for staff and students. All of the opportunities available can be found on the District website under For Staff. Click on the Staff Wellness and Mindful MCPASD links under Employee Services to learn more.

**16. Do you have an encouraging message for families and students in this time of uncertainty?** Yes, we do. These last few weeks have reminded all of us that we are in this together. A month ago, the idea of offering online instruction for more than 7,500 students would have been unimaginable. A month ago, the idea of offering daily meals for our students at sites not in our schools wasn't something we had even considered. A month ago, who would have thought we would have provided so many Chromebooks to students to make sure everyone can participate in virtual learning.

We need to practice patience. We need to be supportive of each other. We know students are missing their friends and are sad about some of the opportunities they normally have that have been lost due to schools being closed. It is perfectly OK to feel down about it. We feel the same way. We want students to focus on online instruction, but we also encourage them to reflect on their achievements. We want to thank them for their hard work, dedication, and support. And, most importantly, we want them to stay safe and be well.