NDSD *from A1*

the school system is an essential service that functions as a pillar of the community and a hub of social connection.

While that looks different in the days of COVID-19, Bennett and the staff at NDSD are doing everything they can to fulfill whatever obligations are necessary to maintain some semblance of normalcy as the world attempts to move forward.

Starting last week, the district delivered 180 meals using the bus-route delivery, a nearly 600-percent increase from the prior system where meals could be picked up at various drop-off sites. Bennett says the district has also already handed out around 100 Chromebooks.

"This is all besides the connection to the community we're getting by running our routes, which is different than running meals to designated spots," Bennet said.

"We're connecting with people. Some people don't ride the bus, but they're on a bus route, so now they know that they A, can get a meal, but B, they actually know that we're involved in this academic work movement. We've had people who've said they don't need the meal, but they want to be connected if there's work that's going to be handed out or back in."

In spite of the rapid shift, the district and school staff have quickly established an ability to get critical resources and information to their students while maintaining a connection and their central role in community affairs. Alas, the kinds of people who chose to pursue education as a career likely wouldn't have it any other way.

"You wouldn't be in education if you didn't want to be with your students," Bennet said. "Now that you don't have your students it makes it hard. So, this becomes another outlet where you get an opportunity to show your students and their families you care."

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>
> *—Terry Bennet, NDSD Superintendent*

In a further effort to keep students, families and school workers emotionally connected — bonds that are especially strong in a rural district with such a small enrollment — last Tuesday (April 7) NDSD staff organized a drive-by parade in order to visit their students during stay-at-home orders.

"Staff members are going to maintain social distancing. They have to stay in their own cars," Bennett said. "But you can add whatever signage you want. One of our teachers had the idea and one of our office personnel wanted to roll with it so they decided to take it on, and they've done that. It's like the drive-by birthday celebrations people have done."

The district's efforts to alleviate the stresses of COVID-19 shutdowns also illustrates the role schools and their services and resources play in equality in a community. As students around the country enter into a new mode of distance learning, computers and internet connectivity become even more essential to participating in education.

"It's not always that [students] don't have technology at home, but it's that the only computer they have at home is shared," Bennett said. "Now, if you have two kids they're not fighting over the desktop and I think that's just meeting the needs of our families so the family can stay on their home computer and we can provide the connection for them to do distance learning in a way that doesn't feel competitive in the home because of limited resources."

It's all part and parcel of local institutions' desire and need to maintain the social, economic and educational fabrics that make up American society and, though stressful and unprecedented, Bennett sees it as a potential chance for students and communities to remember the importance of education beyond grades and schoolwork.

"This highlights how important it is for kids to come to school. When we get back to coming to school, we now get to understand what we miss when we don't. I see this as a true opportunity to really build out the value of school."

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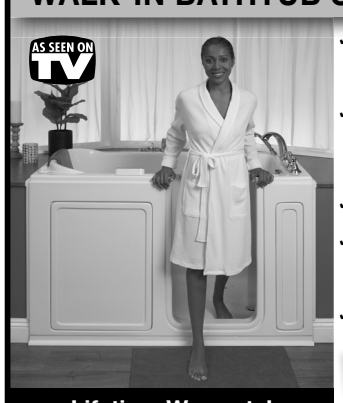

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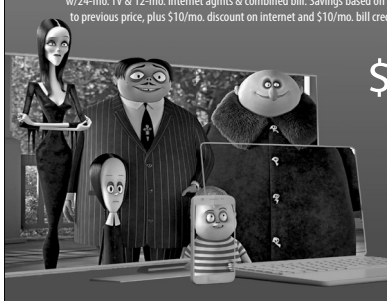
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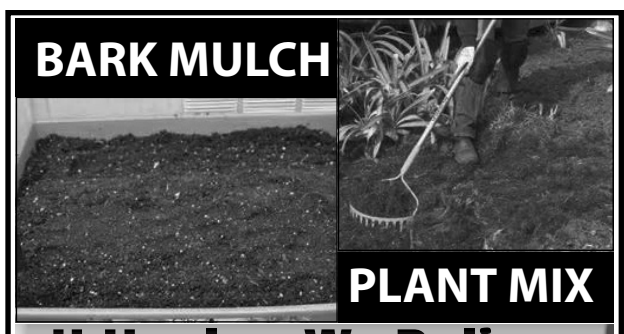
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