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This week Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools (PLSAS) celebrated American Education Week, a time when we honor public education and the many staff members who are making a difference in the lives of students in our community.

This year, as we face educating students during a public health crisis, it seems all the more important to recognize PLSAS staff who have been working tirelessly and have remained committed to educating and supporting students throughout the pandemic.

The global health pandemic has called on our staff to adapt to unprecedented challenges and they have risen to the occasion. Our staff have maintained caring relationships, provided rigorous instruction and continue to meet students where they are in their learning journey.

I am so proud of the perseverance of our teachers, the way they have kept students connected and engaged in school, and excited about their learning. Our support staff have kept our schools running and our students learning in safe environments, and our administrators have been leading by example throughout the uncertainties and complexities of this very different school year.

PLSAS just completed the first quarter of school and as I reflect on this most challenging start to the school year, I am grateful we were able to have several weeks of in-person learning in the Hybrid Learning model with many students.

Due to the significant number of new cases of COVID-19 in Scott County and our school district, we made the difficult decision to shift students to full-time Distance Learning from home. Students in grades 6-12 began Distance Learning on November 12 and elementary students will follow their older peers beginning November 30.

As we begin Distance Learning 2.0, it is not the same as the emergency Distance Learning students experienced last spring. This school year's Distance Learning program reflects improvements over last spring based on staff, parent and student feedback. Distance Learning 2.0 is a structured and comprehensive learning experience with more synchronous (online at the same time) learning where all students in a class will participate in learning together.

While we continue to make the most of Distance Learning, our goal is to get back to in-person learning as soon as we can safely and logistically do so. We need our entire community to work together toward the in-person learning goal and help us stop the spread of COVID-19 so students can get back to the classroom. Please wear your mask, practice social distancing, wash your hands and keep your contacts limited to those closest to you and your family.

It is also important for parents/guardians to call their child's school - even while in Distance Learning - if their student is diagnosed with COVID-19. Doing this will allow us to continue to

look at our local district data and not have to rely solely on Scott County COVID-19 case rates when determining learning models. As cases in our county and school district decrease, the sooner we will be able to get back to in-person learning.

The health and safety of our students, staff and families remains our top priority. We remain committed to educating our students to the best of our ability given this public health crisis and the community spread we are all experiencing. I am confident we will get through this together. Thank you for your ongoing support and partnership.