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September 2, 2020

Dear Brainerd Warrior Family,

Welcome to the 2020-21 School Year!! Whether our students are returning to school this fall via the hybrid or distance learning model, the Brainerd Public Schools staff are ready to return to learn. After six months away from our buildings, we are eagerly anticipating our students return to school on Tuesday, September 8, 2020.

I want to begin by telling you a little bit of trivia about myself: I love themes and theme parties. Over the years, I have thoroughly enjoyed decorating my house with the change of seasons, planning birthday parties, sewing Halloween costumes, adorning my classroom and especially implementing original Back-to-School Kickoffs!

Five years ago, when I was selected as Brainerd Public Schools Superintendent, I challenged myself to find a creative way to introduce myself to the staff, administration, Board of Education and the surrounding community. I thought, "Why not throw a party?" Let's have a celebration of the new school year! You guessed it, my introductory theme was, "Happy New Year!" It was a new year, a new beginning with a new superintendent. We had confetti, blowers, t-shirts... you name it! It was *AWESOME!* (However, the cleanup was a mess.) The following years' themes included: Bluer than Blue; #BeBrainerd; and We Are Under Kidstruction as we began our extensive building projects, in thanks to our generous and supportive community.

Moving forward, I must admit, selecting a back-to-school theme for this school year has been hard! With the onset of COVID-19 and all of its negative implications, it has been difficult to come up with an encouraging theme to celebrate SY 2020-21. How do we stay positive and hopeful when faced with all of the adversities before us? Our planning team deliberated over needs for safety and health, distance learning, a new hybrid model, home supports, nutritious meals, child care, transportation, community cares, PPE and social distancing, enrollment changes, budget projections and more... just to name a few.

Our committee agreed that we have had enough negativity and we are committed to taking the high road!! That is what a warrior will do. We are not worriers, we are Brainerd Warriors! After thorough deliberation, the Back-To-School team, in unanimous agreement, selected the 2020-21 school year theme: ***"When Life Gives us Lemons... We Make Lemonade."*** We have taken this proverbial expression to encourage optimism and a positive can-do attitude, while in the face of the many adversities before us.

Working together, we are ready to do something incredible, to make lemonade, out of the lemons that have been thrown at us. Throughout the next year and as you visit our lovely district facilities, you will see a lot of lemons, lemonade stands, lemon trees, bright yellow colors and associated slogans posted in an effort to encourage optimism, positivity, commitment and hopefulness! You will see students and staff learning together again while celebrating with joy in their hearts. You will witness teachers, paraprofessionals, bus drivers, cooks, executive assistants, building and grounds team members, technology supports, the Board of Education and the administrative team implementing safety protocols in an effort to make a positive difference in the life of every child in which s/he meets. You will observe firsthand the implementation of the Brainerd Safe Learning Plan while practitioners juggle the in-person, distance and hybrid learning models, as necessary, due to COVID-19. You will participate in looking out for and taking care of one another as we progress through the many phases of this challenging global pandemic. You will have an eyewitness account of students, in their highly effective new

learning environments achieving intellectually, socially, emotionally and physically. You will view the use of technology and distance learning implementation like never before. You will see very young children laughing, playing and learning with one another. You will be a partner in everything we do, as we “Squeeze the Day.” Together, we hold the core belief that education is the foundation to our future and we ensure that “Every Day is a Fresh Start for Learning.”

As our district mission statement suggests, *in partnership* we are committed to making lemonade (or something wonderful) out of the lemons we had thrown at us. When life gives us lemons at Brainerd Public Schools, we:

- *Juggle them. If we do not know how to juggle, we set the lemons on the dining room table and call it a “still life.”*
- *Recognize that lemonade is the most inexpensive way to turn those lemons into something tasty.*
- *Look up to the sky and say, “thank you.”*
- *Regift them to someone with a Vitamin C deficiency.*
- *Tell a friend, “My husband just gave me these lovely lemons. I was hoping for limes, but now that I see them, I just love these little, yellow rascals.” and*
- *Do the lemon dance! We get bonus points if you dance to “The Lemon Song.”*

My friends, thank you for joining our resilient Brainerd Warrior team. Although this message is meant to bring hope and perhaps provide a simple smile during this difficult time, I want to assure you that we are taking this COVID-19 global pandemic very seriously. At the forefront of our District’s decision-making is the health, safety and well-being of our students, staff and community. We cannot do this alone - we need everyone implementing safety protocols in an effort to keep our school open for student and staff engagement.

Welcome Back to Brainerd Public Schools where we make *magic* out of lemons. Here’s to a “zesty” new 2020-21 School Year where, “When Life Gives Us Lemons...We Make Lemonade.”

Respectfully,

Laine D. Larson

Laine D. Larson
Superintendent of Schools
Brainerd Public Schools - ISD 181

District Mission Statement: Independent School District 181, in partnership with the community, will ensure all students achieve their individual potential by providing the highest-quality programs and resources to prepare learners for an ever-changing global society.