August 4, 2020

South Whidbey Staff, Students, Families and Community,

I hope you and your family have enjoyed the summer weather in these trying times. As we work together to eliminate the spread of this deadly virus, we are forging ahead with plans for school. We know that learning occurs best in a full-time face to face model. This plan will be brought to the school board for discussion at the Board Workshop on August 12th. Final approval of the plan will likely occur that evening.

Staff will officially begin on August 31st and will work with the administration on the first three days to train our staff regarding the multiple plans selected. We will refine our distance learning instruction and how to best work within a distance and hybrid program.

From September 2-11, we will begin the school year with a "soft" opening - 100% Distance Learning Plus program - all students will work 100% remotely from home while staff will be working together on planning, assessment and delivering online instruction. More information on “soft opening” will be shared later in the summer. The soft opening is similar to our normal kindergarten opening. Teachers will contact students and families individually regarding the way we will operate as it relates to each student. Teachers will administer assessments with students during this time to determine where they are in the curriculum and their social/emotional status. We expect a wide range of readiness in every grade. Curriculum will be determined based upon the needs of the student. We will also continue with staff training and readying ourselves for the flexible school year as we work within every form it takes. Both Oak Harbor and Coupeville have similar agreements for calendar adjustment.

Beginning September 14th, per the recommendations of the back to school advisory team and the rising COVID-19 cases, we will start with a Hybrid Learning Limited program, level 3 on our dial - all students will participate in distance learning, staff will be able to be onsite for the purpose of planning and delivering instruction. However, in this limited hybrid model there will be limited face to face time with our most vulnerable students, including Kindergarten and some students receiving special education services, on a very limited basis. Most of this will occur outdoors. Face to face teaching time will be worked out individually between the families and teachers, specialists, and counselors. Families with children receiving special education services and kindergarten students will be contacted individually to work out
specific details of their child’s participation. All students and staff involved in face to face instruction must complete a daily health attestation and be symptom free.

The distance learning in this model will not be the same as the program from the Spring. We have learned what worked and what didn’t work. Staff and families provided feedback to assist in our improvement. We will have a specific curriculum that allows for in person and online teaching flexibility. You can expect:

- Less Zoom time
- More videos that students can watch on their own time
- More hands on activities
- A training help desk for parents and students
- Education based on the Core 4. The Core 4 will use Google Classroom (grades K-2 will use SeeSaw) for all, Google Drive for all documents, Zoom for direct contact and synchronous learning, and click and play videos for asynchronous learning.

Currently, Island County, as with the rest of Washington and the nation, is seeing a rise in COVID-19 cases. Although these numbers do not appear individually high in South Whidbey, we are still affected by their numbers. Many of our residents work in Coupeville, Oak Harbor, Everett and Mukilteo which have had very large increases. Once we see the curve flatten, we plan to start a Hybrid Learning Plus program for the families in our district that have requested it. The Hybrid Learning Plus will include two days of face to face instruction (limited to a max 10 students per indoor classroom) and three days of remote instruction. Students who come to the buildings face to face must complete a health attestation prior to their arrival on a daily basis. Any students with COVID-19 symptoms will be sent home and encouraged to be tested. Any COVID-19 positive case must be quarantined for 14 days and all students in their 10 person cohort will be notified of a positive case (without naming the student). Contract tracing will occur through Island County Public Health. Students and staff who have tested positive must be symptom free for 72 hours prior to return (after the required 14 day quarantine). Remote instruction will continue for those in quarantine unless they are unable to participate due to illness.

If the curve remains flattened and we are able to keep the exposures in South Whidbey limited, we can move into the Hybrid Learning Full program. In this program, we will continue the same hybrid days for students with increased capacity in the classrooms (perhaps 15 - 20 students per classroom). We will evaluate our opportunity for more face to face instructional time every thirty days beginning October 15.

Within all of the remote and hybrid options, there are multiple plans that are still being developed based upon the requests from families. These plans will be developed between the teacher and students within the framework created by the administration. Please be prepared
that we may need to switch gears and be back to 100% remote learning at any time as cases arise within the district. As a district we are planning for the best and preparing for the worst. Please note that there will continue to be **100% remote learning options throughout the year until it is safe to return to school full time.**

Safety is our highest priority. I continue to attend meetings with OSPI, the Island County Public Health Department, as well as superintendents across the region. In my call with the health department last Wednesday morning the report is that we are seeing 12-15 positive cases per week now and remain at 11 deaths. Our transmission rate is 1.2 and being under 1.0 is the goal. We discussed all of the issues around opening and the "what-ifs" around illness in our schools.

Snohomish County Health Department has recommended all remote learning for all schools in Snohomish County. Both Snohomish and King Counties are still in phase 2 of the State reopening guidelines. We know that most, if not all, of the Snohomish and King County districts will open at 100% remote this fall. Island county is at phase 3 for reopening and South Whidbey towns still have the lower single digit numbers for confirmed COVID-19 cases.

Our survey to families provided input. Right now about 70% wish to have students return to class (hybrid model of two days in school and three days remote) and 30% have no plans to be face to face. Our kindergarten enrollment is still down about 50%. However, we have students that normally attend private schools in the area that will be joining us in the Fall. I have been meeting with our union representatives, everyone wants to be back to normal and with the students in classrooms. However, they are worried about exposure and the challenges of starting and stopping face to face instruction.

Safety from COVID-19 is our first priority. There are many other factors as well. Many home situations require both parents to work outside of the home, so not having children in school is a huge impact. Some students have difficult home situations that make school their safe space. Schools provide food and health services. Schools provide social emotional support. We all know how important opening is to everyone. However, we also know families have members who are highly vulnerable. Many of our staff fall into this category. The factors are many and must be considered with every decision.

At any time, during the school year, we may need to vacate the buildings of teaching staff and focus completely on 100% Distance Learning. South Whidbey is challenged with limited substitutes. If our teachers become ill, we will be forced to return to a 100% distance learning model. We are taking every precaution to avoid this situation and provide the best learning for our students while maintaining safety for all.

Our goal is to be back in school with **100% face to face learning.** We will continue to monitor the situation at hand as we proceed with our planning for the school year. Please remember that the decisions we make are for the
current moment and may or will change as the situation adjusts. If a vaccine becomes available or if numbers go down, we may adjust back to our normal instructional plan. Please do your part and limit your outings, remain at a safe distance, wear a mask, and wash your hands frequently.

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