



Press Release
August 16, 2024

Update from San Juan Island School District Superintendent

Dear Friday Harbor community,

The days are getting shorter as summer begins to fade away ushering in the colors of fall. The change in seasons reminds us that the school doors will soon be open for our island students who, without a doubt, are looking forward to reuniting with friends and resuming their daily routines. We at San Juan Island School District enjoy this annual new beginning. Don't get me wrong; we love summer vacation. But for all of us who have chosen education as a lifelong career, nothing is better than watching the children return to the classroom.

It has been a busy summer preparing for the 2024-25 school year. Summer School was held at all sites in July and August. In addition, various capital projects were completed including:

- New flooring in the remodeled science room
- Elementary road repairs making more room for busses
- Installation of electronic door locks in the STEM building
- Installation of a charger at the elementary for our new electric utility vehicle the maintenance staff will use. Impressively, FHHS students refurbished this electric vehicle in one of their classes!

Even more, SJISD is opening, or reopening, two new offerings to its already robust educational program. The first is the San Juan Island School District Early Learning Center which includes Transition to Kindergarten (TtK) and Developmental Pre-Kindergarten (DPK) and is housed in the former Head Start building. We are also reopening Stuart Island School after its closure over ten years ago. To ensure that we are prepared for each of these changes, office and custodial staff have been hard at work in July and August ordering, cleaning, repairing, and installing.

This school year, as many as 27-30 new students are enrolled at the early learning center. The development of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills before entrance to kindergarten is essential for future achievement. In fact, data provided by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) demonstrated that in the fall of 2022, kindergarten students who participated in transitional kindergarten programs outperformed their peers on all six domains of the WaKIDS assessment. The WaKIDS assessment is given to all kindergartners statewide at the beginning of each school year. In a separate report drafted by OSPI it was found that "students who were kindergarten ready in literacy and math before entrance into kindergarten were more than 1.5 times as likely to meet proficiency standards on the third grade ELA [English Language Arts] and math assessments." Learning of



these outcomes makes us excited to offer this opportunity to ensure that our youngest students on San Juan Island have access to early learning programs, public or private.

I want to again re-emphasize the impact the Stocker Foundation had on making the Developmental Pre-Kindergarten a reality. Unlike TtK which the State fully funds, DPK receives partial backing from ECEAP, a State early learning funding source. We are grateful to the County early learning coordinators who assisted us in receiving that allocation. To bring DPK to fruition, however, we needed the substantial donation of the Stocker Foundation, an organization that continues to enhance the quality of life and opportunities available on this island through its generosity. As Superintendent, I am extremely thankful.

We will be welcoming a huge variety of students to the first day of school on August 29: Students from pre-K through twelfth grade, students on both Stuart Island and San Juan Island, and traditional students as well as alternative students learning at Griffin Bay School. Before these learners enter through the doors, however, teachers and staff have an opportunity to participate in professional development. Training for our staff is difficult because of the time commitment due to our geographical limitations. Therefore, SJISD is initiating the first-ever San Juan Institute. On August 21-22, teachers and staff will listen to experts in their field who will be coming to Friday Harbor for face-to-face presentations. The keynote speaker on August 22 will be Jeff Utecht who will present on the ever-changing landscape of education with the rise and influence of artificial intelligence. Some notable other sessions this year are Multi-language Learners in the Classrooms, AVID Collaborative Study Groups, An Introduction to AVID Principles, K-12, and Supporting Students with Disabilities: Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, and Other Reading Limitations.

The offerings demonstrate our commitment to providing well-deserving staff with the resources to continue the educational excellence recognized in this school system. As I wrote last year, the objective is to provide ALL students with the opportunity to live a limitless future. That remains the target. The great staff at SJISD work collaboratively and diligently to ensure that this is a reality.

Like our staff, our school board directors are constantly working for the good of our schools and students. School Board Chair Sarah Werling-Sandwith has accepted a position as our school district's TtK teacher; as such, her last school board meeting was in July. She always gave generously of her time and brought knowledge of the education system and a deep commitment to our public schools. She will be missed on the board but the students and families in her TtK classroom will benefit by having her as their teacher this fall. In the next few months, we look forward to welcoming a new board director to our excellent school board which is dedicated to working collaboratively to maintain the high quality of our schools.

I will once again close with the idea that Great Community and Great Schools are intertwined. Every summer I am reminded how we are all so fortunate to live and work on an island with such good people who value a quality education. Seven new



teachers will join this team for the 2024-25 school year. Although some already lived in Friday Harbor, all new employees will soon recognize how amazing this school system is and how it reflects the character of our community.

And so, it begins. With the fair closing on August 18, many students will hit the ground running the very next week. Athletic practices begin at the secondary campus with contests set for the first of September. Some of the Friday Harbor High School Jazz Band students will join the Lakedale All Stars to close the night at the 7th annual Lakedale Annual Music Festival on August 24. Soon, auditions and practices will commence for this year's school play. We are just two short weeks away from the first day of school on Thursday, August 29. We expect another great year. You can remain proud of a school district committed to the excellence our children deserve.

Fred Woods
Superintendent
San Juan Island School District