Press Release

August 26, 2022

Update from San Juan Island School District Superintendent

Dear Friday Harbor community,

After a two-year hiatus, it was like a breath of fresh air to see the return of the San Juan County Fair. Walking through that front gate felt good, and dare I say, normal.

The end of the fair indicates that the start of school is just around the corner. New and returning students will once again fill the halls. As always, we look forward to experiencing the excitement of the possibilities that lie ahead for each child. There is an eagerness to get back to the classroom and continue the educational journey. Two years ago, parking lots were empty; athletic contests postponed; the smiles on the faces of the children were behind a screen. Today, athletes are already practicing on the field of play; students and families have been meeting with personnel preparing for the upcoming year; staff are back in the building preparing in earnest. Dare I say again, this feels normal.

We are cognizant of the reality that we remain in a pandemic and not all is “normal.” Uncertainties still exist. Your schools will continue to follow guidelines developed by the department of health that will mitigate the spread of COVID. Students and staff will still quarantine if they contract this disease. We have hired a dedicated team of nurses and health aids to manage the concerns, maintain communication with the local health department, and provide services such as testing for all students with parental consent and staff when requested. Your schools will remain committed to safe practices so that students can have a successful school year.

We are ecstatic to be opening the doors to children once again. I said two years ago that nothing replaces live, face to face education for many students. The social interaction is vital. For others, though, they found that the independent and online approach worked best. In this district, we offer both. The San Juan Island School District K-12 in person program is robust, but we also offer a vibrant online or hybrid format through Griffin Bay School. The opportunity to choose is one of the lessons we learned through this crisis, and we are working hard to provide that and meet students where they are.

We have assembled a talented team of close to 150 people to serve your children from the bus stop to the classroom and everything else in between. We know there is work to do. COVID’s impact has been dramatic. Our community’s children, though, deserve our best. And we can promise we will do our best to provide that.

Our new high school principal, Andrea Hilman, middle school principal Rod Turnbull, and elementary principal Holly Wehner will introduce several new staff members to the rest of the district on Monday August 29th when our employees return to work. The first school day for students is Thursday, September 1st.

The last two years have been difficult, but we are resilient. Next week marks a new chapter and we get to author the story. The buildings will be full of students, Friday night lights will blaze, and schools will create community for children once again. There is no doubt we will face struggles and we may have to make changes throughout the year in response to what is occurring globally. We can do this, though. Just like the return of the fair, the start of school is refreshing and full of promise.

Fred Woods

Superintendent

San Juan Island School District