



Press Release
February 25, 2021

San Juan Island School District Superintendent Fred Woods
Returning to In-person Learning

It is hard to believe that it has been almost a year since schools were closed across Washington due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been difficult for all of us, but at this point, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Now that we are in "phase two", I feel very optimistic that we are heading in the right direction.

I am proud of the work this school district did last March to quickly create a remote learning program to serve the public school students of our island. Since last year, vast improvements have been made to our teleschooling program, Griffin Bay School was reimagined to provide flexibility to families, and the Food for Thought food service program created healthy meals-to-go and found ways to get breakfasts and lunches to our community's children, ages 0-18. An argument could be made that this remote educational model is not as strong as a traditional one. However, our students have shown great fortitude in finding success under circumstances that none of us expected.

In late fall, the elementary school opened the doors to our youngest learners, kindergarten through 2nd grade in a hybrid form of in-person learning. In February, the rest of the elementary students joined them. On Thursday, February 25, the middle school will bring students back to campus.

It is now our pleasure to announce that on **Monday, March 8, Friday Harbor High School** will also begin in-person learning using the same hybrid format implemented in all the other schools. Specific information for families will be sent to them concerning this reopening by the end of this week.

This will not be school as normal. It will not be like before where students come to school, throw their books in a locker, and meet up with their friends. Rather, it is a very controlled environment and we will strictly follow the guidelines outlined by the state and our county's health department. Only half of the students will attend at a time, in either the AM cohort or the PM cohort. Each day when students enter the building they will go through a visual health screening. Masks will be worn at all times. Social distancing practices are expected.

In preparation for the return of students to the buildings, the district has purchased appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and hired additional custodial staff and support for the school nurse. We have also added additional paraeducators and substitute teachers to accommodate specific situations that do not allow for in-person teaching and to ensure social distancing.

We have made changes to the schools' physical plants as well. Filtration and ventilation systems have been updated. Restrooms, sinks, and dispensers are now touchless. Plexiglas dividers are in high traffic areas. Cleaning and sanitizing protocols have increased in efficiency and frequency.

Specific precautions and protocols are in place to mitigate the risks. The district has developed a carefully considered, detailed plan promoting a safe and healthy environment.

In addition to the return to in-person learning, high school athletics is also resuming. On February 17, the 2B/1B league (our league) made the decision to begin the spring sports season on February 22. Our board has approved participation. To do this safely, there are strict requirements for coaches, athletes, and spectators. Specific information regarding these expectations will be sent to high school families from the athletic office.

The foundation for all our decisions this past year has been one of safety. The faculty, staff, and students deserve a cautious approach to reopening. However, it is now time to move toward an educational model that includes in-person learning. We are aligned with the Governor's phase 2 guidelines as well as the state metrics used for re-opening schools. Our students deserve the opportunity to take part in the best education possible in a safe manner.

Even though faces are masked, you know that every elementary student is smiling when they come into the school. They want to be here. We can also say without a doubt, the secondary students are eager to return. And we are so happy to be seeing our students again. It has been too long!

As has been the case throughout this entire pandemic, plans could change. If this crisis has taught us one thing, it is that we have to be flexible, show grace to each other, and hope for the best while planning for the worst. At this point, it is best for us to return to school K-12. We are excited to make this announcement and look forward to what the spring means for the San Juan Island School District.

Respectfully,

Fred Woods
Superintendent
San Juan Island School District