

# PT School District approves reopening plans amidst family survey returns

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The Port Townsend School District Board of Directors gave the official nod to a resolution approving the updated version of the district's reopening plan for all four schools late last week.

The updated plan, "Version 2.0," as it's called, was OK'd by the board via Zoom Thursday, Aug. 20.

The plan had been presented in its revised form at the Aug. 13 meeting and was expected to be advanced last Thursday without noteworthy changes, which it was.

However, officials said their protocols will obviously continue to be revised as the science regarding the virus develops and state and local directives require changes in light of either escalating or decreasing instances of infection.

Ultimately, the goal of the plan was to give every student as much direct interaction with each other and their teachers as was safely possible.

Also discussed at last week's meeting was the initial round of feedback from the still-ongoing family learning model choice survey.

District families have been receiving phone calls and emails asking them to choose between 100 percent distance learning, blended learning, or to indicate they would like to enroll in the OCEAN program.

As of Thursday, officials said, 780 families had replied.

Of those, 45 chose the OCEAN program (about 6 percent); 320 opted for distance learning exclusively (41 percent); and 415 chose blended learning (53 percent).

According to district officials, 273 families had yet to respond and individual efforts would be made to reach out to them.

Additionally, the board heard a preliminary enrollment report Thursday.

Officials said there had been 31 student withdrawals in the district, with another 48 potential returns still pending.

Four students were technically withdrawing, but had in fact merely transferred to the OCEAN program, officials noted.

Enrollment data was still being gathered.

Of those withdrawing, officials said the most popular reasons were to elect home schooling or out-of-district online programs.

No updated staffing decisions have been made yet in light of the new enrollment estimate, with officials noting the attendance margins are thin and more data being required before any such permanent adjustments are made.

Sarah Rubenstein, director of communications for the district, noted the numbers would fluctuate throughout the first week of school at least, as usual, with additional enrollments, withdrawals and schedule changes.

In summary, the available learning models — “blended” being a mix of in-person and online or “distance” learning, and “distance learning only” meaning exclusively virtual-based education — for each Port Townsend School District institution are:

- Port Townsend High School: Most students will participate in distance learning with up to 125 students, selected by need and expressed family choice, allowed a blended learning option which allots twice weekly in-person sessions;
- Blue Heron Middle School and Salish Coast Elementary: Most students will participate in blended learning, physically attending classes twice a week during either Monday/Thursday or Tuesday/Friday sessions, with exclusively distance learning available by family choice; and
- OCEAN: The district’s alternative learning program will be 100 percent distance learning-based.

Guidelines released by Gov. Jay Inslee advises — but does not mandate — restricting or canceling in-person education and extracurricular activities, including sports and artistic/performative endeavors, in both public and private schools in nearly every county in Washington based on individual area’s current levels of transmission of the novel coronavirus.

Jefferson County, however, despite a continued slight increase in cases, is one of very few counties in the state considered “low risk,” having logged less than 25 cases per 100,000 in a recent two-week period.

For such areas specifically, the state recommends respective schools teach elementary schoolers in person and consider a hybrid model for older students, one which incorporates a blend of in-person and remote instruction.

Additional changes this year will include the omission of “F” as a potential grade, with students who perform unsatisfactorily in a given course earning an “Incomplete” instead.

Masks will also be required while riding a school bus and any student who forgets or loses their mask will be provided one.

Students will not be required to wear masks at lunch, but the district has specific plans that the schools will share for students to remain in their cohorts and have lunch in their classroom or a secure area, officials said.

“Cohorts” is the term the district has applied to groups of students in class together.

Continued physical distancing, designated entrance points, and clearly marked traffic patterns in hallways will be utilized to further promote health and safety.

Additionally, schools will perform temperature checks with contactless thermometers as students and staff enter the facility. Students found to be exhibiting symptoms will be isolated and their family notified immediately, officials said.