

# Port Townsend School District presents reopening plans

Posted Wednesday, August 12, 2020 2:33 pm

**Maria Morrison** [mmorrison@ptleader.com](mailto:mmorrison@ptleader.com)

The Port Townsend School District is gearing up for an academic year like no other, which is set to begin Sept. 8.

District officials held an informational meeting for families this week to announce plans for the 2020-21 school year, including general class expectations for the four schools within the district: Salish Coast Elementary School, Blue Heron Middle School, Port Townsend High School, and the Opportunity, Community, Experience, Academics, Navigation (OCEAN) Program.

Prior to the info meeting Monday, district spokesperson Sarah Rubenstein outlined many of the policies that were certain to be in place across all schools.

Students at all schools will need to maintain 6 feet of physical distance from each other in their assigned seats, and wear fabric face coverings. There will be minimal movement around or between classrooms, and, when possible, different teachers will rotate among classes, instead of students.

Those who are allowed to and choose to return in-person will be sorted into groups (called cohorts) of 15 or fewer students.

Who can return to on-campus learning depends on the needs of the different grades. The high school and OCEAN are mainly distance-learning, Rubenstein explained, while Salish Coast and Blue Heron plan to implement blended modes of instruction.

## AT ALL SCHOOLS

“Our first priority will always be the health, safety, and wellness of students,” said Superintendent Sandy Gessner-Crabtree.

The primary reopening priorities outlined by the district are health safety and wellness, equity, face-to-face instruction, communication, and academic progress.

Shelby MacMeekin, director of special services for learning support, outlined the health and safety requirements in order to keep the schools open in some capacity, including temperature screening at dedicated entry points, improved cleaning and disinfecting, and separating those with symptoms.

Amid many concerns over technology access, all students will be given some sort of device so they have all the tools they need to complete distance learning.

That online learning will happen through a newly developed “playlist,” a one-stop online shop for all classroom needs. This is an improvement from previous online coursework, which was scattered across emails and websites, leaving kids missing Zoom meetings and not knowing where to submit homework.

Finally, all schools are integrating social emotional learning into their curriculum, and the high school will keep the mental health services open and available.

## **SALISH COAST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

Through universal screening and progress monitoring, Salish Coast Elementary School plans to run a hybrid program in which students will receive in-person instruction two days out of the week, and be remote for the remaining three. The family can also choose to be entirely online.

There will be one homeroom teacher, and cohorts of students will remain almost entirely within their room for the day, with outdoor breaks.

Principal Lisa Condran said that the school is working with the local YMCA to offer childcare for at-home learning days, something parents were concerned about.

Salish Coast was constructed in 2018, making it the most modern of the schools by far. The new building offers rooms of flexible size, Rubenstein explained, because each chunk of classrooms can be opened up to the adjacent ones in the section.

It also comes with an updated ventilation system and lots of outdoor learning space.

This age group especially encounters difficulty with online learning, from the short attention spans of the young children to the expectation among parents of childcare throughout the day so they can work.

“Schools know that distance learning for primary students is not the best method, but it may be the safest method,” Rubenstein said.

## **BLUE HERON**

The plan at Blue Heron Middle School is most similar to the one announced tentatively in June. Families can choose between completely online learning or a blended semester. Cohorts are going to be kept mostly in one classroom where possible.

The cohorts will be designed with friendships in mind, said Principal Theresa Campbell. There will also be coordination between Blue Heron, Salish Coast and the high school for siblings across grades.

Like the other schools, attendance will be recorded daily.

## **PORT TOWNSEND HIGH**

The high school gets more complicated.

The system of cohorts breaks down at this level, as students would normally travel to different classes and even friend groups don't have the same schedule. More specialized classes, as well as greater familiarization with and maturity for distance learning, make it more practical for the high school classes to be online.

The vast majority of students in ninth through 12th grades, therefore, will be online, with up to 125 students granted the exception to come in person through a blended model due to extenuating circumstances.

Principal Carrie Ehrhardt acknowledged that hour-long Zoom calls are too much for students, as was seen through the closing out of the spring semester a few months ago, which transitioned to Zoom. Instead, Monday and Thursday will see synchronous classes, while Tuesday and Friday are for independent work. On these days, the teachers will welcome students for all six class periods and take attendance, but students will then be directed to complete assignments online.

There will be options for one-on-one student/teacher engagement through in-person support available two days per week.

There will also be changes to the grading at the high school, which will not be giving any "F" grades, only "Incomplete." Furthermore, there will be no group scores.

## **OCEAN PROGRAM**

The OCEAN K-12 Program will be entirely online. It will rely on a Parent Partnership program in which families provide at-home instruction per the school's guidelines. Teachers will provide a curriculum and schedule, but families and students are primarily responsible for the home study.

## **FAMILY QUESTIONS**

District officials met the previous week with a reopening committee comprised of teachers, parents, community members, and school staff to review the presentation.

Those plans certainly could change, Rubenstein said, based on family input and local health information. They also will be reassessed every nine weeks, when a survey is sent to families about what is working and what isn't, with changes made accordingly.

There will be a lot for the district to pour over in the coming weeks, between a survey distributed at the end of the presentation and many questions from the audience through the chat function in Zoom.

Many of the questions from families surrounded the services offered by the schools during the normal year.

School meals will still be provided daily, even to families who choose completely online instruction. Logistics are still being discussed about the time, frequency, and location of dropoff or collection of meals.

Bus routes are being changed to accommodate social distancing, and bus procedures, such as loading from the back and keeping windows open for air circulations, are being changed.

Athletic decisions are still pending but the district plans to follow the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association four-season model, with no sports in Season One.

Most audience questions were clarifying the schedule announced, and what options they would be able to choose between.

## **MOVING FORWARD**

Families are asked to take a survey indicating their choice of instruction, which will be confirmed via phone or email this week.

Then, the schedules will be made and cohorts assigned the week of Aug. 20, and families notified of the groupings.

This choice will commit families until the end of the first quarter, Nov. 6, after which they could choose to switch methods of instruction.

There is, of course, the possibility of schools shutting down again the way they did in March. There are many levels of shutdown possible, and the district is putting in measures of containment so that even if one cohort gets sick, the whole school wouldn't need to shut down.

If two or more cases come from one cohort, that cohort will be quarantined.

If there is a schoolwide outbreak, or if more than 10 percent of classrooms must be dismissed for quarantine, the school will close. Additionally, the school could close if there is inadequate staffing due to illness or quarantine.

The entire district could close if the schools are unable to maintain the health requirements of masking, distancing, cohorting, cleaning, and contact tracing. It will also close if local community spread exceeds 25 cases per 100,000 people over a two-week average.

The full information on the Reopening Plan 2.0 can be viewed online at [www.ptschools.org/about\\_us/news/what\\_s\\_new/reopening\\_plan](http://www.ptschools.org/about_us/news/what_s_new/reopening_plan). A recording of the meeting is also on YouTube, available on the same webpage.