

August 7th, 2020

Dear Nooksack Valley Community and Staff;

Tonight, our school board approved the following plan for “re-opening” our schools for the 20-21 school year.

1. Start with remote learning at all levels.
2. Work with administrative team and local health department to get small groups of students back as soon as we can. We think this can happen sooner than later.
3. Work with the local health department on frequent intervals (3-4 weeks?) to review status and determine next opportunities to expand face to face learning. Expansion would likely start at the early grades, and in a hybrid model.
4. Move the start date of school to Sept 8 (from Sept 2). We can do this without adding days to the end, by moving some of the “non-student” days to the start. This will allow for a little more time to provide some parent training, distribute Chromebooks, provide training for staff on the latest technology, and possibly meet with some parents and students before the year gets started.

Here is a list of some of the "why";

1. We have committed from the beginning of this pandemic that our two guiding principles are: a) follow the health department guidelines and b) get our students back in our classrooms as soon as possible.
2. Our Risk Pool Insurance has clearly told us to follow the local health department guidelines or risk loss of coverage. This is a huge factor.
3. This will allow us to "go slow to go fast", bringing back students and staff in thoughtful and doable stages, while practicing our new health and safety protocols and procedures. Starting fast and risking more shutdowns and quarantines would likely be more disruptive.
4. There are many other "operational" barriers to starting with more students.

First thing Monday morning, we will continue moving forward with these plans. I am proud of our staff for the work they have done to date on developing a system of remote learning that will be much improved over what we launched in the spring. They simultaneously developed plans for when we begin bringing students back into our classrooms. Once we have the “go ahead”, we will be prepared to efficiently move to NV @ School. As parents, you can expect to soon have opportunities to learn more specifically about our plans to start the school year.

I have been in public education for many years. Mine is a “personal” business as I’ve never been able to separate the personal from the professional. Compounding that, my own sixth grade and kindergarten grandsons really do need to get back to school. I so wish there was a playbook of some kind, and that we could look back at how we all handled the “last pandemic” in our schools. That is not the case. I went into this business because I have a heart for children and to serve my community. I also pride myself in working together to find solutions to

complex problems. Unfortunately, there are no “right” answers here. There are only best choices based on the current information we have. If we could find a better path forward, I would have recommended it.

I am fully aware, through ongoing conversations, surveys, and a good number of “intense” emails, that some of you will be disappointed with this decision. My hope, prayer, and request is that we now all transition to doing what our community always does. Let’s together focus on making this work as well as we possibly can. Let’s keep our eye on “NVPRIDE”, and on the longstanding reputation Nooksack Valley has earned, as a community that positively pulls together in challenging times.

With Great Love and Appreciation;
Mark Johnson