

Hello Houghtaling Families,

The new school year starts September 8th! Our staff is already back at work preparing and participating in professional development. We are very excited to see our students again.

Across the country and in our community there has been much uncertainty about how to safely re-open schools. We are very fortunate in Ketchikan to have the conditions and resources needed to have on-site school five days a week and do so in a manner that will be safe for students, staff, and family members. Here are some of the changes we are making:

New Student Classes

In order to create smaller groups and greater distancing, we have added classroom teachers and re-structured some classes. This means that no room will have greater than 16 students, with many classes even smaller. Our librarian Penny Ranniger will be teaching in 5th grade, and Miranda Tucker will be teaching in 3rd. Ms. Ranniger is a dearly-loved part of our building and excited to be back in the classroom. Ms. Tucker worked as a highly-valued para in our building last year and comes with years of teaching experience in Canadian communities including Port Alexander. In another change, our English Language Learners (ELL) teacher, Penny Hamlin, will be the teacher for our Pioneer Preschool. Having taught preschool for many years in the district before transitioning to ELL, Ms. Hamlin's an excellent fit for our needs.

Four larger classes will spread out into two rooms each. These teachers will partner with Teacher Assistants to collaborate in the classroom. For these classes, there will never be more than 12 students in a room, which means excellent one-on-one attention! The teacher will move back and forth between the rooms giving lessons, answering questions, and providing feedback. We are fortunate at Houghtaling to have neighboring classrooms with connecting doors. Those doors will always be open and aides and teachers will be able to move fluidly back and forth throughout the day. I'm excited and impressed with the creative ideas staff are coming up with to take advantage of these small learning groups.

These new sections necessitated the moving of students from their originally-assigned classroom teacher. Following previous parent input as much as possible, we carefully re-balanced classes to ensure quality learning and class cohesion. If your child is being assigned a new teacher you will be contacted directly by either Dean of Students Meredith Lundamo or myself.

Annex

In order to create the space needed in our building, our preschool classes will be moving offsite. For this school year, the Houghtaling preschools and the Pioneer Home Preschool will be housed at Ketchikan High School. This space was formerly used by central office staff, is contained with minimal interaction with high school students, and they will have their own separate restroom facilities. Our preschool teachers are excited about the possibilities in the

space and the chance to make it a welcoming environment for their students. With this change, no other grade will need to move off-site for our school.

Orientation Week

Students will begin attending school starting Tuesday, September 8th. That week, each student will attend for just one assigned day. All children in a household will be attending on the same day. Classroom teachers will be contacting families for which day their child should attend. We are doing this to help students learn all of the new procedures of the school and ease the transition after the long break. Regular school with academic instruction begins Monday, September 14th. Beginning that week we will also have Friday Early Release for staff professional development.

School Start/End Procedures

In order to maintain student pods, limit the interaction between pods, and conduct symptom screenings, Houghtaling is modifying the school start and school end procedures. Beginning at 20 minutes before the start of the school day, students will enter the building through their assigned door and head straight to their classroom. A student eating school breakfast will eat in the classroom and all students will remain there supervised by their teacher until the beginning of school. At the end of the school day, students will be released in stages of walkers, parent-pickups, and bussers. When the bus routing has been completed by First Student, our transportation provider, we will be able to release the times for student arrival and departure. Look for that information soon. Unfortunately, to limit student congregation, no student may be on the playground or any other part of school grounds before the set time. Likewise, no students may remain at school at the end of the day and our playground will be closed until 4:00pm.

Risk Levels

Our school district's Smart Start Plan will be using three risk levels, Low, Medium, and High. This will allow us to adjust based on the level of Covid-19 infections in the community. Fortunately for Houghtaling, there will be no substantial change for our students when moving between Low and Medium, except that at Medium they will attend onsite Monday-Thursday instead of Monday-Friday. At the High level, all students and staff will be at home and our building will be closed. Teachers will continue lessons asynchronously using a lesson management system called Canvas. This will look distinctly different from the "Zoom Lessons" delivered in the spring and will continue teaching new academic content.

Recess

The podding strategy will also apply to recess. Each class will have two supervised recesses, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, where the class will be able to go outside in a class-designated area. We recognize the importance of physical activity, breaks, and of course the need to have fun! Recess is an important part of child socialization, and so it continues with the above changes. There will be no before-school recess or lunch recess since those would be times when pods could not be maintained.

Safety

Our safety plan has many layers since our strategy relies on each piece reducing the chance of the spread of Covid-19. No one piece is the magic technique. Instead, all are scientifically-proven components that work together. They include Masking, Podding, Symptom-Checking, Isolating and Contact-Tracing, Handwashing and Sanitizing, and Limiting Visitors.

Masking

All students and staff will be required to wear masks while inside Houghtaling. These masks may include types such as cloth, surgical, or gators. Vented masks are not to be worn. If a student loses or forgets their mask, or their mask gets wet, we will provide them with a disposable mask. Face shields may be worn as an alternative if the shield has a cloth hood and/or collar. We recognize that some students may struggle with the newness of masks, especially at first. We will not shame or put-down students, but instead encourage, remind, and help build this important safety habit. If your child has a medical or physical reason that will prevent regular mask-wearing, please contact your child's teacher to begin the discussion of alternatives.

Pods and Distancing

All students have been separated into class pods no larger than 16 students. You may have heard the term cohorts, which is similar. However, at Houghtaling we are Dolphins, so pods seem much more appropriate. Though students may interact with each other within the pods, the interaction between pods will be very little. Moreover, teachers may break students into smaller pods within the classroom for activities that require more regular close social interaction. This will allow us to continue important socialization activities, especially in younger grades, while keeping risks low. Pods will also reduce the number of students and staff that may have to quarantine if a positive case occurs in the building. The small groups will also allow large amounts of distancing. In almost all rooms, students will even be able to be spaced 6 feet apart.

Symptom-Checking, Isolating and Contact Tracing

All students will be screened, including temperature checks, upon entering the building. If the student displays symptoms related to Covid-19, including a temperature of 100.4 degrees or greater, they will be placed in a safe and isolated area for further evaluation and instruction from our district nurse. In cases of concern, students will be sent home and given a timeline for when they may return to school. That length of time will vary based on the individual case of the student, but will always be at least 24 full hours in the case of a fever and may be as long as 10 days (or a negative Covid test). More information on this will be coming soon. If a positive Covid-19 case is identified in the school, students and staff who may have been exposed will be asked to quarantine and cannot return until 10 days have passed or they receive a negative Covid-19 test. A child in quarantine will continue to receive work from their teacher, much as they would for any other illness or vacation.

Handwashing/Sanitizing

Students will regularly wash their hands and will receive training on correct hand washing procedures. We are fortunate to have sinks and soap in almost all classrooms at Houghtaling. The district has contracted with a company for regular disinfecting and are increasing our custodial staff to thoroughly clean the building.

Visitors

The number of visitors to the building will need to be very limited during this time. However, we of course welcome collaboration and communication with families! If you wish to meet with your child's teacher, attend an IEP, or meet Meredith or myself, you will simply need to make an appointment in advance. The front office will be open to collect dropped off items such as lunches, forgotten books, etc. Our office administrative assistants will also be available to assist with the filling out of paperwork and answering general questions.

Alternatives

Family situations are different, and if these safety procedures will not be able to reduce the risks to the level your family requires, we understand. Several at-home learning options exist through the district. Some, such as the Alaska Virtual Academy, include materials, curriculum, and access to Ketchikan School District teachers. Another alternative is the Fast Track Homeschool program. In using this program, the parent is the teacher of the content. A child in these programs will not be placed in a class at Houghtaling or necessarily have a Houghtaling teacher. Please check the district webpage for more information on these programs. In order to staff our programs accordingly, a child that attends an at-home program will not be able to enroll in an onsite school until a trimester break. They may have to be placed in a school different from the one in which they were enrolled earlier.

Moving Forward

As we learn more about Covid-19, and as the conditions in our country and community change, our plan may be adjusted. We recommend you stay in close contact with your child's classroom teachers and ensure your information is up-to-date to receive emails and texts from the school. This school year will be unlike any other, but we are excited for the opportunities the small classes and focus on learning bring to our Houghtaling scholars.

To your child's success!
Michael Cron