



**SCHOOL
DISTRICT**

Preparing children for an ever changing world

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Thursday, August 6, 2020

Subject: Neah-Kah-Nie School District's plan to start the school year with virtual instruction

Dear Neah-Kah-Nie School District Community,

Neah-Kah-Nie School District continues to monitor the ongoing spread of COVID-19 in our community while planning for the 2020-21 school year. A lot has changed since we first closed our school buildings to prevent the spread of COVID-19: New research from around the world has helped us understand COVID-19 a lot more, and health experts in our local community and from across the state have now developed guidance for how to safely reopen school buildings.

Importantly, countries that have managed to safely reopen school buildings have done so with declining infection rates and on-demand testing. Presently, Oregon has neither. The escalating infection rates of the past few weeks make it clear the pandemic is not yet under control.

County-specific metrics [released by the governor, Oregon Health Authority and Oregon Department of Education](#) further warn of the risk in reopening our school buildings too soon.

The most current Oregon Department of Education *Ready Schools, Safe Learners, Guidance for school year 2020-21* (Version 2.7.2 July 22, 2020) can be found here: <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Documents/Ready%20Schools%20Safe%20Learners%202020-21%20Guidance.pdf>

As our public health partners provide insight into what the pandemic will look like this fall, it has become increasingly clear that even with the required safety protocols that have been developed - including physical distancing, cohorting guidelines, contact tracing, face coverings, etc. - *if we bring our students and staff back together, I believe, we will have COVID-19 outbreaks.*

Not only will COVID-19 outbreaks directly impact infected individuals and their families, but it will also require the quarantine of exposed students and staff for several weeks, ultimately leading to the breakdown of in-person learning. This repeated opening and closing of classrooms and schools will be highly disruptive to the learning process. Inevitably, this pattern will continue until our communities and public health authorities have the virus more under control.

As your superintendent, it is my obligation - and my priority - to safeguard the wellbeing of each of our students and employees. With that being said, I cannot in good faith put health and safety on the line when infection rates are rising and our communities do not have the resources to quickly and effectively address outbreaks.

Given these factors, Neah-Kah-Nie School District is shifting its focus and planning efforts to begin the 2020 school year in a Comprehensive Distance Learning environment.

We will reevaluate this decision on a periodic basis based on state and county-level metrics. Currently, we expect to be in a comprehensive distance learning framework through the first nine weeks of the school year. Hopefully, we will transition to a hybrid model (Comprehensive Distance Learning/On-Site Learning) by November 16, 2020.

We know distance learning presents its own set of challenges, as we experienced this spring. Many students and families are struggling physically, emotionally, and professionally in a remote setting.

Along these lines, we will need to be creative and thoughtful in how we elevate safety and equity as we plan our services; clearly, we must redouble our efforts to genuinely engage students and families this fall. My expectation is that by making this challenging decision now, we will spend valuable time and resources focusing exclusively on how to best deliver remote services to children and ensure authentic connection with families. This week, sixteen Neah-Kah-Nie school administrators, teachers, and school counselors are participating in the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators Summer Conference: *Preparing for Our New Year*. Also this week, more than twenty teachers and administrators participated in a presentation by NWRESD on online curriculum and platform options. I am happy to announce Tillamook County School District's received a \$350,000 Rural Connectivity Grant. These funds will assist with internet connectivity throughout Tillamook County to enhance comprehensive distance learning. Writing this grant was a collaborative effort with NWRESD, Tillamook County Commissioners, and all Tillamook County school districts.

In this complex situation, no plan of action actually *feels good*. But we are committed to making decisions with input from our families and staff, and grounding resulting decisions in science and data...and that *feels right*.

The school district must improve how we teach virtually. We are also aware that comprehensive distance learning is not all about an increase in screen time. Students must be physically active and have opportunities to develop positive relationships with staff and peers. We will not continue with the same delivery model as last June. Yes, we were very successful as we transitioned from a face-to-face teaching/learning model to a virtual model. We reacted to a crisis and did a commendable job. However, we must improve service delivery for students and parents. This takes time and high quality professional development. The school district has decided to dedicate September 8-11 as comprehensive distance learning training days for all staff.

Given these factors, Neah-Kah-Nie School District will begin the 2020-21 school year in a Comprehensive Distance Learning model on September 14.

Here are some of the areas we will focus on:

Relationships & Connection

- Daily real-time check-ins between staff/students
- Daily peer interaction
- Daily attendance

Family Engagement & Communication

- Increase family/parent virtual connections
- Increase family & student feedback

Instruction

- Increased daily learning time
- Focus on Teacher-Facilitated learning time
- English language support and SPED support provided through real-time opportunities
- Students will have grades on their report cards; will not be pass/incomplete
- Increase physical activity time/activities for all students

I know for many this is a disheartening message to receive. There's nothing we all want more than to educate students in our schools in a hybrid model or on-site learning. Our district leaders will continue to work with staff, students, and families as we reshape our fall plans for this current, very unfortunate reality. We will continue to reach out to you with updates and opportunities to provide input.

Again, I hope you are safe and healthy. If you would like additional information, please go to nknsd.org, communicate with your child's principal, or contact me.

Be safe,



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