



October 28, 2020

Dear students, staff, families and community,

Enjoy the final week of October as well as the extra hour of sleep on Sunday. Don't forget to turn back your clocks. Whether or not you celebrate Halloween please be extra cautious on Saturday as there will be children trick-or-treating. My hope is you all get a treat rather than be tricked. Have fun and be safe!

Last week I announced that we are planning to start a hybrid model for in person and remote learning for Kindergarten through sixth grade students on November 16th. Thank you for completing the learning choice form. As of this morning there have been 510 responses with 347 (68%) requesting the hybrid model and 132 (25.9%) requesting to stay in remote learning. We are waiting for more responses to confirm the number of students staying in the Mount Baker Academy. This information will help us determine any adjustments that need to be made with staffing classrooms to meet the needs of these learning choices. Please complete [the learning choice declaration](#) ([in Spanish](#) and [in Russian](#)) right away, so we can plan accordingly. This link will be closed Thursday at 9:00 p.m. Call your student's building administrator if you have problems completing the form. Families who do not complete the declaration and/or do not contact their children(s) school(s) will be defaulted to hybrid.

I received quite a few emails with great questions over the weekend. We are currently in the process of planning, but here are some points of clarification:

- The decision for our hybrid model was made by our reopening committee based on the Decision Tree for In Person Learning and the recommendation from the Whatcom County Health Department to phase students into in person learning slowly and cautiously. While every Whatcom County District is going at a different pace, we believe our model will build confidence that we can safely bring students to school with the hope of building on this success and increasing the in person learning at some point in the school year.
- If a student is learning in the hybrid model and develops symptoms, they can learn remotely while they need to be home. As long as they check in for attendance and complete their assignments, they will be counted as present.
- If a student is currently participating in the YMCA School-Aged Care Program, they can continue in that program for both remote and hybrid choices even if they do not attend Harmony Elementary. The District will provide busing to accommodate the needs of families.
- There may be changes in teacher assignments because most teachers will be working at school teaching the hybrid model, but some teachers and staff will be working remotely to support that learning.
- If at some point in the year a family chooses to change from remote learning to hybrid learning or from hybrid learning to remote learning, we will work with the family to accommodate their needs.

Earlier this week I had a meeting with the Washington State Department of Health for an update and clarification on guidelines. Since I was emailed some questions about symptoms and the [return to school flow chart](#), I want to share the following from that meeting to provide more understanding:

- Daily symptom checking is required but can be done in a variety of ways with at home screening, on-site screening, and periodic parent attestations with in person visual checks for illness or a temperature.
- Face coverings are required.
- Mitigation strategies, particularly when layered, are effective in reducing/minimizing rates of transmission.
- A small number of studies published on school transmission show low rates of transmission and successful application of coordinated mitigation strategies does not lead to a large increase in cases.
 - 3.1% of reporting schools have indicated greater than 5 cases
 - 0.7% reporting 10+ cases
 - An outbreak is 2 or more unrelated cases in the same school
- Education modality in the moderate level encourages phasing in of in person learning beginning with the youngest learners.
- If all goes well with our youngest learners, then junior high and high school students can be phased in.
- Changes to allow more extracurricular activities was based on stakeholder feedback that the first draft of the Decision Tree was too restrictive and did not account for students' mental health needs, and equity with community-based programs.
- If a student has symptoms, they should be out of school until seen by a medical provider who provides an alternative diagnosis, a negative COVID test, or are out for 10 days from the onset of symptoms.

I understand that it is disappointing to many of you that we are not moving faster. By re-entering our schools safely and successfully, we will be further ahead in the long run. You don't always win the race when you are the first one out of the gate. We will be tenacious and build our endurance for an awesome second semester. Keep up the good work and stay "Baker Strong" so we can make this happen.

Sincerely,

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