Good Afternoon Aspenwood Community,

Well I finally have something to communicate.  Thanks for your patience.

What follows is what I know so far.  It will probably change but it is my current understanding:

We will be emailing new Kindergarten parents separately with instructions.  If you have a child coming for Kindergarten or know someone who hasn’t received the Kindergarten email soon after this email please have them contact me.

Students in grades 1-5 will return to school for a very brief check in on Thursday, September 9th.  This is just a check in.  We will supply a time and a place for each grade and students will come within a one hour time window.  They will probably see last year’s teacher and will need to make eye contact and get checked off and should then leave the grounds immediately.  That’s all we will need from them but this is far more important than it sounds.  I will provide more details next week.

Students in grades 1-5 will be welcomed back for one hour on Friday, September 10th.  We have divided the school into thirds alphabetically so siblings can attend at the same time.  At this point we anticipate emailing the details of where and when each child should assemble on the grounds.  We are aiming to send the information out on Wednesday, September 9th .  In most cases the previous year’s teacher will be bringing the small group of students into the school.  The students will remain physically distanced as this will not be their learning group.  The teacher will spend the short time doing a Covid safety orientation.  Dismissal will be from the same location that they met.

After Friday each child will be assigned to a “Learning Group.” This will include his/her class and a group of adult staff.   Learning groups have a hard limit of 60 in elementary and the current indication is that this can only be guaranteed by not mixing classes at any time.  Please don’t try to influence the selection of learning groups.  As I’ve said in the past we spend an inordinate amount of time creating classes that are balanced and represent a good academic and social location for each child.  The fact that the class becomes the “Learning Group” doesn’t change that.  If the child your son met over the summer is not in his Learning Group you can still make the decision to have them play outside of school.  Learning Groups only determine close interactions at school.

Organization of all activity at school will be structured around making every effort to maintain physical distancing between students and staff outside of the Learning Group.  Within the learning group there will be less emphasis on physical distancing but there will be additional precautions in place.  More details are included on the attached documents.

Recess and Lunch present tremendous challenges at a school as large as Aspenwood. With 22 Learning Groups that cannot intermix, sending the students out for free play is not possible at this time.

Recess will look a great deal like it has in the past on rainy days.  For fifteen minutes the children will do unstructured activity in the classroom under the supervision of a grade team teacher who will move through the 3 – 7 classes.  Students will only be allowed out of the room under strict conditions we developed in June (more later).  There will be no intermixing of Learning Groups.

In the same vein, there will be no outside free play time associated with lunch.  Eating will be under the supervision of Noon Hour Supervisors and only half the school will be eating at a time.   The lunch break will be 30 minutes and students will remain in their rooms.

However, I do anticipate a great deal of outdoor activity.  Teachers are aware of the need and will be taking the students outside for supervised play.  Again this will not involve intermingling groups.  We have an organization for reserving areas that mitigates this.

Full-time school in the new classes/Learning Groups will (finally) begin Monday, September 14th.  We will be emailing all families their child(ren)’s new division.  School will start at 9:00 for the entire school year.  With so many multi-child families we are going to try to avoid staggered starts and dismissal.  It will make for a bit more congestion but will eliminate groups congregating waiting for the other child’s start/end.  The email will also indicate where (and how) to gather on Monday.  Classes will be spread around the grounds and meeting locations will also be dismissal locations for K-3.  Teachers will pick up their class/learning group at 9:00 and proceed into the school in a way that minimizes interaction/risk.  Dismissal will be at 2:40.  There will be lots of details coming.

On district orders we will be strictly controlling access to the school building.  The point is obviously to limit exposures.  Persons other than students and staff can only enter the building with an appointment and must go through a screening process.

The cornerposts of our plans to keep the students and staff safe are the Learning Groups, social distancing, the use of PPE outside of learning teams and where distancing isn’t possible and the routines for movement, hand washing and prevention education for the students.  However, probably the most important will be the daily checks we need parents to do at home.  The details are described in the attached documents but we require that parents be rigorous about ensuring students do not come to school if there is the potential that they have Covid.  Our staff will of course be following the same procedures.  In the event that a child shows signs of illness that could be Covid will be isolated until they can be picked up.

For many of you this will be enough to reassure you that we are taking your childrens’ safety as seriously as we are taking our own (literally).  I do appreciate the many emails that said in essence “We trust you.”  I also understand that it is completely possible to trust us but not feel comfortable sending your child back to school.  We appreciate the sentiments expressed in those emails too.

Below you will find a link to a Survey.  It is incredibly important that you take the survey for each child that is registered to attend Aspenwood.  I cannot stress enough that we need to know your intentions as it has significant implications for the school.

Many of you have contacted us with questions about your options with respect to your children returning.  I just want to say I am feeling very confident with what we have in place going forward.  When I look at the fact that there have apparently only been 178 cases in the entire Tri-Cities area in seven months it puts the risk in some proportion.  For me the relatively small community risk combined with all the precautions her school is taking makes me feel confident to send my daughter to school.

Having said that, there are some options for those of you who are looking.  There are to explanations of the alternatives links in the Survey preamble but my Coles notes are:

School Based Gradual Transitions Supports (K-8)

This is for those of you who need some time to get back to full attendance either because you want to feel comfortable with the measures being taken or because your child needs a bit slower process.  Your child will be registered at Aspenwood and assigned to a classroom.  The teacher will NOT be supporting your child remotely but will be actively engaged in welcoming him/her back into the classroom on a schedule determined by the child and your needs.  Our goal will be to have him/her back in school full time as soon as everyone is comfortable.  The nature of this return will be individual.  While our first choice is that the children come back right away and get going with the class, if that isn’t possible I’d suggest that this would be the best choice.

If the return takes longer than a week or so the district is committed to distributing learning support materials to you.  Instruction and support for the child would have to be done by someone at home and, while individual teachers MAY look at completed materials the classroom teacher will not be providing ongoing support.

There is no place on the Survey to register for this option but if you plan on returning slowly you should indicate that you are “Unsure”. That’s the first step.

Encompass K-9

This is the district’s distributed learning option for elementary.  It’s a good program that has historically been exercised for students with a variety of learning needs.  It was operating close to capacity prior to Covid and, from what I understand, is not an easy program to scale up.  Some Aspenwood parents have already indicated an interest in being on a waiting list but I would not put all my eggs in this basket.  Parents are also the primary support in this program. Students attending Encompass are registered in that program and will not retain registration at Aspenwood.

Homeschooling

A lot of people throw this term around when talking about not returning in September.  It is a step you should consider very carefully.  If you register with the government for Homeschooling you must leave Aspenwood.  While we would welcome you back space permitting, at Aspenwood it often isn’t.  When homeschooling you become the teacher and have virtually no support from the school system.

There is also a Hospital Home-bound program available for some students in care of a specialist.  There are links to information about it in the Survey.  Please do one Survey per child.  Thanks in advance

[Return To School Survey](http://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=74xl2ZICUkKZJWRC3iSkS-XJPXhX8VhHoACU6F1u11hUOEtHTVhNR1gxUTVISFNZREYzVTJLNTVZMy4u)

There are other documents attached to this email.  One is a generic Principal to the Community letter supplied by the District.  I like to write my own but it probably has information I didn’t cover.  The second are the Health and Safety protocols that we will be following.  No information for 2 months and now enough for a weekend’s reading; with more to come.

Enjoy your weekend,

Kevin Akins