



**BASS LAKE JOINT UNION
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
DISTRICT**

"Every Child...a Promise"

<u>Superintendent</u>	<u>Board of Trustees</u>
Randall M. Seals	Ronda Clarke
<u>Chief Bus. Officer</u>	Julie Greenwood
Tara Campanella	Ryan Madaus
<u>Admin. Asst.</u>	Stella Pizelo
Jeanne Ratchford	BJ Stewart

40096 Indian Springs Road

Oakhurst, CA 93644

(559) 642-1555

<https://www.basslakeschooldistrict.com>

September 23, 2020

RE: Updates on School Reopening Plans & Elementary School Waivers

Dear Bass Lake School District Students, Staff, Parents, Guardians, and Community Members:

Wow! What an incredible start we've had to the 2020-2021 school year! The COVID-19 pandemic and the Creek Fire have had such a major impact on all aspects of life for all of us in our mountain community. If that was not enough, we've also experienced multiple power outages, mass evacuations, additional evacuation warnings, extremely hazardous air conditions, severed high-speed internet main transmission lines, and numerous other connectivity issues. And yet, through it all, our students and teachers have continued to perform amazing work with seemingly Herculean efforts. The spirit of our mountain community can not be broken just as the past six months have demonstrated time and again.

The purpose of this letter is to communicate with our district's stakeholders some important updates with regard to changing health department guidance and pandemic conditions that will have significant impacts on our schools. On July 22, 2020, I announced publicly in a letter that all schools in the Bass Lake School District would open the 2020-2021 school year with distance learning and independent study options instead of in-person instruction, and that this model would be constantly monitored with re-evaluation of school reopening plans to occur at the end of the first quarter. The first quarter is scheduled to end soon on October 9. This letter is in accordance with that announcement to re-evaluate our district's situation with updated information from health officials, and our school reopening plans that have brought us to this point so far.

Recently, the state released new small cohort guidance that allows a school district to create small clusters of instructional teams made up of no more than 16 total members, including students, teachers, and other support staff. The guidance allows these cohorts to attend school in-person where they may receive intensive support that is nearly impossible to provide in a distance learning environment. Our district plans to use this guidance to begin bringing small cohorts of students in our special education Special Day Class (SDC) program back to campus on October 1. Strict adherence to safety protocols and health department guidance will be followed. Student participation in these cohorts is voluntary, as distance learning options will still be available for those students who are not ready to return to in-person instruction on campus. The small cohort guidance is separate from previous school reopening guidance that school districts throughout California had first received over the summer, and was created to allow a district's most needy students to receive the educational support that can only be provided effectively and efficiently through on-campus instruction in closed small groups of no more than 16 members (any combination of students, teachers, and support staff).

With regard to guidance related to elementary school waivers, the Madera County Department of Public Health announced this week that they are now receiving and considering elementary school waivers for on-campus instruction for grades TK-6. Districts may submit waivers with input from parents, certificated staff, classified staff, and community stakeholders. Surveys administered previously by the District have provided an abundance of critical information focused on plans to reopen our schools in accordance with securing a waiver. Additional stakeholder engagement will continue to occur in the coming days and weeks as we continue to navigate through this pandemic and changing guidances. Our district plans to submit a waiver to the county health department and, if granted, begin on-campus instruction as early as the week of October 26 (the week we return from October Break).

Such plans may likely include a gradual reopening of our campuses, beginning with our youngest learners first (TK-1), and then adding additional grades each subsequent week or so until all grades TK-6 have returned. The waiver program only applies to grades TK-6, so grades seven and eight will be forced to wait for a return until the county moves from Purple (Widespread) to Red (Substantial) status. The conditions of the waiver also mandate that everyone in the cohort---students and staff---must maintain at least six feet physical distancing at all times. It is highly likely that our model may be a hybrid model of instruction to comply with this mandate given the size of a typical classroom in our district. The hybrid model features a combination of in-person, on-campus instruction and distance learning. According to the governor's orders, when a county's status changes from Purple to Red, all grades (TK-12) may begin returning to school, in accordance with local reopening plans and procedures, as well as state and county health guidelines.

For parents and students who do not wish to return to on-campus instruction for whatever reason, our district will continue to offer distance learning options.

Additionally, the pandemic's conditions in Madera County have begun to improve rather dramatically. While always subject to change, the infection rates have fallen over the past week or so. In fact, those infection rates continue to be lowest in eastern Madera County which makes up most of Reporting Area D. We are currently on a course that *could* see Madera County change from Purple to Red within the next few weeks. Still, we must continue to emphasize the importance of following guidance, including the use of face masks/shields/coverings, hand washing, use of hand sanitizer, and physical distancing while in public. According to our health officials, such adherence to guidance has brought us in Madera County to the point where we may soon transition to Red, and a reopening of not only our schools, but so many other businesses and critical community activities.

To summarize, the Bass Lake School District plans to begin reopening on-campus instruction on October 1 with the special day classes at Wasuma and Oak Creek Intermediate utilizing the state's small cohort guidance. The District also plans to submit an elementary school waiver in accordance with state and county guidance, which would allow for additional students and grades (TK-6) to begin returning to on-campus instruction by late-October if approved. The pandemic's conditions in Madera County continue to improve to a point where the county may be just a few weeks away from moving from Purple to Red, which would allow schools in all grades TK-12 to begin reopening for on-campus instruction. All such plans must strictly adhere to health guidance that calls for the use of PPE (face masks/shields/cloth coverings), physical distancing (six feet minimum), hand washing, and the use of hand sanitizer. We will continue to work with stakeholder groups (parents, community members, teachers, classified staff, students, etc.) in preparing our district's waiver application and to develop and implement plans to return students to school campuses for in-person, on-campus instruction to some degree as soon as possible, as health conditions allow.

These past six months have been the most challenging I've experienced in my 29 years in public education. None of us in education entered the profession to work with students solely in remote fashion. Still, a combination of governor's executive orders, conflicting and ever-changing guidance from multiple agencies, and the ramifications of the Creek Fire have caused so much disruption in the lives of all of us in the community. Though these conditions have caused some to become quite frustrated, and at times exasperated, the support continually shown by parents and the community to our district and especially to our incredible teachers and support staff is greatly appreciated and treasured. Thank you for your patience and understanding as our district team has worked incredibly hard to "make lemonade" out of all the lemons that the past six months have provided us.

All my best,



Randall M. Seals
Superintendent