

Tahoma Community News

January 2021

Tahoma School District

Maple Valley, WA 98038

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Classrooms begin to reopen

Grades K-3 resume in-person learning, with grades 4&5 to follow

After months away from classrooms because of the COVID-19 pandemic, students in grades kindergarten-3 will begin returning to school on Feb. 1.

In-person classes for grades K-1 begin on Monday, Feb. 1; students in grades 2-3 will begin in-person learning on Feb. 3. Return dates for students in other grades have not yet been determined. Families who wish to have their children continue with remote learning can do so.

Schools will operate daily on morning and afternoon schedules, with half of the in-person students attending each session. The morning session will begin at 8:15 a.m. and dismiss at 10:45 a.m. The afternoon session begins at 12:15 p.m. and ends at 2:45 p.m. When students are not in the classroom, they will work on their own at home and also will have online learning activities with specialists in music, art, Future Ready, STEM and PE.

A recent survey of elementary school parents shows that 48 percent of families want their students to return to school, while 29 percent will remain in remote learning. Another 19 percent want to remain with their teacher, regardless of whether it is in-person or remote. About 3 percent of families did not respond at the time of the survey and were contacted individually.

Tahoma closed its schools last March, when Gov. Jay Inslee ordered all schools to move from in-person instruction to remote learning as COVID-19 spread rapidly across the state, nation and world. During the summer months, as transmission rates



Tahoma District Nurse Coordinator Jennifer Lyons at the site of Tahoma's new COVID-19 testing program, available to staff and students attending in person.

for the virus declined, Tahoma created plans to bring students back to school, following guidelines established by the state Department of Health. Unfortunately, COVID-19 infection rates began a swift rise in September, which led the district to postpone in-person learning plans and continue in 100 percent remote learning, with exceptions for small groups of students who have special needs.

In mid-December, the state Department of Health issued new guidelines for schools,

based on the latest research that indicates COVID-19 transmission in schools is very low if proper health and safety protocols are followed.

In a letter to all Tahoma School District families, Superintendent Mike Hanson outlined how the return to classrooms will work. He explained the changes to state guidelines, which call for the district to bring back its youngest students first, in groups of up to 15 students regardless of community COVID-19 rates:

“Tahoma remains firmly committed to providing our students an exceptional education, and we know that in-person instruction does just that, so it is no surprise that we are very excited about the updates. In fact, we have spent many months building a safety plan so that we would be ready for this opportunity when it became available. Families will have a choice in returning to in-person instruction or remaining in the remote learning model,” Hanson said.

He further explained that the return to elementary school would look different than what existed prior to the pandemic:

- All students and staff will wear masks, wash their hands frequently and follow social distancing requirements.
- Students will stay in their classroom groups as much as possible. No meals will be served or eaten at school, and there is no recess. Grab and go meals are available for students to take home.
- Bus transportation will be provided for both the morning and afternoon sessions. Families will be assigned to a session based on their neighborhood's transportation schedule. Siblings will attend the same session in order to best support our families.
- As required by the Department of Health, prior to coming to school each day, families will need to submit a quick online attestation form confirming that their child does not have any COVID-19 symptoms.

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Teachers, students develop new ways to create, learn, connect

Since March of 2020, school has been anything but typical, but teachers and students in art, metals, and other classes at Tahoma High School have found new ways to learn, create and build in the remote setting.

Just like other classrooms throughout the high school, on most days, the art rooms sit empty except for the teachers. But on one fall afternoon, the roll-up doors stood open, and students trickled past to drop off their ceramics artwork for firing in the kiln. Wearing masks and following distancing protocols, teachers exclaimed over the pieces, and students described parts of their process or what they loved about the finished piece.

“What I love about teaching art is seeing their faces light up with pride, excitement and self-confidence within themselves, from what they have learned and created in their art classes,” teacher Kara Oxner said.

“Students not only walk away with actual products that they have created, but they also discover great things about themselves through their various problem-solving skills, challenges, planning, execution, presentation, persistence and time management skills,” Oxner said. “They are discovering that they can accomplish great things, and you can see the pride they have with that success!”

Remote learning has certainly presented challenges for art classes, just as for every other subject and grade across the system. Despite that, Tahoma High School’s art teachers and students are finding success. Earlier this fall, the art teachers offered a special supply pick-up for their students, with items that vary by class. Ceramics students, for example, received a 25-pound block of clay, special tools to carve and shape with, and a canvas mat to work on.

Fellow art teacher Jennifer McCoy, who is also the head of the Visual Arts Department, said “My students are rocking this fall. Last spring was just emergency learning. This fall is full blown school, and they are rising to the challenges and doing a great job.”

Sophomore Taylor Dideon, who is in Oxner’s ceramics class, said that before the year started, the idea of remote learning art was worrisome. “To be honest, I was actually quite nervous to create art with clay,” Dideon said. “But, actually, it’s really easy and really fun to work with. My confidence has definitely improved because my creations are turning out really good and close to what I drew and designed. So art this quarter has been really fun and awesome to prove to myself I can create something out of clay and have it turn out well.”

And, she pointed out, the remote learning aspect – and different types of access to teacher help – can in certain circumstances



Ceramics students created a wide variety of projects, such as this piece for a tile assignment.

help the student in the long run. “Remote learning really falls on the kids and I don’t think it’s bad at all because it’s teaching the kids how to problem solve. It’s teaching the kids how to make things work and how to get creative, and that’s what art is all about: Being creative and figuring out how you’re going to make your design work.”

Art teacher Amy Goldberg said most of her students have risen to the situation. “This is difficult for them. I’m proud of their efforts. This fall, the quality of work/engagement has increased a lot compared to last spring,” Goldberg said. “As students and teachers are getting comfortable with the format and learning how to connect with each other, things seem to be improving. Students are required to really dig in and look at their own learning.”

The best part of remote learning is everything that the students are learning, Goldberg added. “What excites me the most is that students are seeing what is possible and what they are capable of accomplishing.”

Metals program builds strong foundation, remotely

In a normal year, Tahoma High School students in Scott Newton’s metals classes would be designing and creating projects in the shop, measuring, cutting, drilling and wire feed welding. This year, Newton and his students have been adapting to remote learning.

The Metals 1 class has spent time completing all their safety training so that when COVID-19 numbers allow a return to in-person learning, his students can hit the ground running, safely. They have also focused on learning the design process using a Computer-Aided Drafting (CAD) although they are using a new online program called OnShape because it wasn’t feasible to use their usual program, Inventor. OnShape can run on any device from Chromebooks to phones, and Newton says it is allowing his students to learn the skills they’ll need



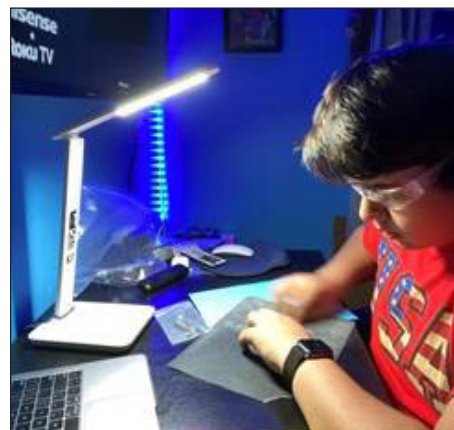
A student in one of Amy Goldberg’s beginning painting classes created this work.

to use Inventor when they get back to the building.

During fall quarter, the class members tackled a new project to build their own scribe, a tool used to mark a piece of sheet metal. It can be set to mark at a certain distance, then used to swipe across the edge of the metal. It can also be adapted depending what it will be used to mark with or on, Newton said.

“We designed and built a whole scribe from our homes,” said Callie Milam, a freshman in Newton’s class. “I liked that first we got to put it together on Onshape (The designing program). Then we got to put it together in real life in our own homes, it was really fun!”

“I think it’s so cool that I can go around and show and tell my family all about what I’ve been doing during metals. I thought that I wasn’t going to be able to do anything, and then we learned how to design things online and our teacher Mr. Newton would cut them at the school,” Milam said. “I never expected to learn all that I did because I thought metals was just welding and building things, but it was more than that.”



Students in Scott Newton’s metals class created a scribe tool at home. The project included practice in design, layout, deburring, fit and finish skills and cutting threads. The scribe tool is used in metalworking to mark a piece of sheet metal.

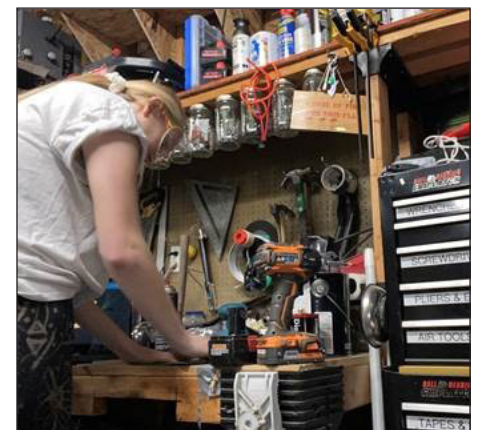
The scribe project offered students the chance to practice design, layout, deburring, fit and finish skills, and cutting threads. All of those skills will carry over to other projects they will complete later, Newton said. “A long time ago, a shop teacher said, ‘It’s not the project, it’s the process,’” he said.

Advanced metals students have been learning about how in industry a project would be contracted for design, then built out. “(Metals) is such a broad subject area. There’s a lot to learn about welding processes, and the design process, so we can lean more heavily on those,” Newton said.

In another project, students were assigned to complete some type of small home improvement project. It didn’t need to be expensive, require any new tools or supplies, or take a significant amount of time. Instead, the idea was that each student would sit down with their parents or guardians, get permission to complete a project and find out what would be helpful, such as putting felt pads on the bottom of kitchen chairs and table to protect the floor; touching up paint or drywall; oiling the hinges on a door or cupboard. It was an opportunity to learn something, help out around the house and recognize similar concepts.

“I always tie it back to: There are so many similarities when you’re working with your hands in all of these trades. For example, the concept of deburring, clamping things down when you drill, or always sanding in one direction,” Newton said, noting that fundamental concepts can be reinforced through projects around the house.

“I am so impressed with the work of Mr. Newton and his students as they find unique and meaningful ways (such as the scribe project) to understand the design process and the hands-on opportunities that are associated with our Metals classes during this challenging time,” said Marty Barber, Associate Principal and CTE Director for THS.



Students, parents partner with district on equity work

Three students and three parents spoke to the School Board, sharing about the work that two committees have done to begin changing the Tahoma School District to make it a more equitable, welcoming and safe place for all students and staff.

“We want student voices to be heard,” THS junior Aliaya Nesru said, asking that the district incorporate student experiences and opinion in each decision that affects students, to help encourage lasting change through collaboration.

The six representatives are part of a group of 50 students, parents, community members and staff who have been working together, along with Tahoma Director of Equity Emilie Hard, to lead the way toward the equity goals identified by the School Board and Superintendent Mike Hanson.

“This isn’t a project,” Hanson said, thanking the committee at the end of the presentation. “This is a pathway that you get on and don’t get off.”

The representatives of the larger committee began with a discussion about the distinction between equity and equality. Equality aims to ensure that everyone gets the same things in order to enjoy full, healthy lives -- and, it only works if everyone starts from the same place and needs the same things. Equity involves trying to understand and give people what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives, because needs vary by individual, they explained.

“Equality and equity doesn’t mean that we’re taking anything away from anyone,”

parent and committee member Alicia Busch said. “It’s making sure everyone has what they need.”

In addition to student voice, which Nesru spoke to, the committee’s other five main areas of focus will be:

- **Staffing:** Parent Joe Brazier emphasized that increasing equitable and inclusive practices in hiring should include not only recruiting and retention of diverse employees, but also a matter of providing cultural support.
- **School culture and climate:** Junior Hadley Johnson said that while she thinks Tahoma has taken positive steps, there is room for improvement, such as increasing clubs that celebrate diversity, creating zero tolerance for slurs and promoting other efforts that will support student and staff mental health.
- **Family engagement:** Busch said that the committee plans to increase opportunities for meaningful engagement, beginning with a virtual event planned for February.
- **Curriculum and instruction:** The district’s goal is to provide curricula that include diverse perspectives and counter narratives, and uses culturally responsive instruction to support each student. Sophomore Tanveer Grewal shared this quote from John Lewis: “If not us, then who? If not now, then when?”
- **Professional development:** Brazier emphasized that the key to true change in many of these areas will depend upon

“We want student voices to be heard.”

-Tahoma High School junior Aliaya Nesru

district staff members. For example, while it may be a daunting task to find a fully non-biased curriculum, teachers and staff can acknowledge any bias and address it.

Professional development began this summer. Dr. Caprice Hollins of Cultures Connecting, is supporting staff learning in cultural competency through training in awareness, knowledge and skills. District administrators and leaders, each building staff and the School Board have participated in an initial virtual training with Hollins about diversity, our own racial identities, uncovering biases and stereotypes. Sessions with some classified staff are planned for later this year.

Hanson shared with the board and the community that Tahoma is also participating in two collaborative groups about equity: one includes 18 districts from the state of Washington, sharing information and ideas, and the second includes districts from five states that will be discussing best practices around equity and social-emotional learning.

The School Board members participated in

an initial equity session with Hollins. She told the board members and community members in attendance that the work the district is beginning starts with each individual in our community. It’s something we all need to participate in because it takes everyone working together to dismantle systems of racism, she added.

There are four bodies of work to engage in: awareness, knowledge, skills, and action/advocacy.

Hollins talked with the board members about listening for understanding, and asking someone who is sharing to explain further. It’s also important not to try to “fix” what someone is sharing about, but rather to offer support or simply thank them for sharing. Another key objective is to create space for different voices, to take risks by engaging in conversation, and to expect and accept non-closure. “No matter how much you lean in, the conversation is often going to end up feeling unresolved,” Hollins said.

Conversations about race and equity are not comfortable, but we (our society -- our community) need to have them. “Is my comfort more important than someone else’s pain?” she asked. Board members, staff members and community members who attended the meeting had discussions in breakout rooms as part of the session.

“We practice, and when we practice, we get better,” Hollins said. “Whenever I feel the most discomfort, that’s when I lean in.”

To read more about equity, visit the Equity page on the district website.

New year offers return to classrooms, opportunity to reimagine goals

The new year is off to an exciting start for Tahoma School District students and families. On Feb. 1, we will begin bringing more students back to school. And on Feb. 3, we will host our 2025 Board Goals Cafe virtual meeting, where the community is invited to join in as we identify the course we will set for the next few years.

I think we are all eager to look ahead. I won’t dwell on the challenges that we have faced in the past few months. But I would like to thank our students, families and staff for the many ways that they have worked together and contributed to solutions as we deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. This kind of approach, which we call the Tahoma Way, is so important to maintain support for our students during these unusual times.

Since last March, when schools in our state closed as the pandemic worsened, we have looked forward to bringing students back for in-person learning. Our first attempt to do that last fall was thwarted by a spike in community COVID-19 cases. The health



Superintendent Mike Hanson

guidance that was in effect then was modified by the state Department of Health on Dec. 17. The new guidelines, which are based on the latest research, will allow us to bring students back to buildings in a phased approach.

We will begin with our elementary schools. Kindergarten and 1 will start on Feb. 1. Grades 2 and 3 will return on Feb. 3. Students will attend for 2.5 hours per day, with a maximum of 15 per classroom. There will be morning and afternoon sessions.

Grades 4 and 5 will come back in a few weeks, but we don’t yet have a firm date. After that, middle school and high school students will return to their campuses. We have a team working on reopening school

for grades 6-12 and will share details as soon as we can.

We recognize that reopening schools is not going to meet every family’s needs or expectations. We will continue to offer remote learning for students whose parents are not comfortable with in-person instruction or whose schedules will not allow them to participate. We’ll also continue to make adjustments as the year progresses, looking for ways to improve. We are looking forward to the day when all of our kids will be back in school full time.

As we think about the day when everyone returns to school, we want to ensure that our goals are clear. That’s why we’re asking our community to help us by participating in the Feb. 3 Board Goals Cafe.

In a recent survey of parents/guardians, students, staff and community members, four areas of interest rose to the top as being among the most important for student success, and most in need of improvement:

- Mental health support for students;

- Student & staff experiences on cultural understanding, diversity & equity;
- School climate and culture to build healthy relationships and effective collaboration and partnership;
- High expectations for student growth and academic success.

The cafe will help us to understand what the district’s stakeholders mean when they say they want improvements in these areas. We will also use focus groups, listening sessions, cafe sessions on a specific topic, and other research to learn more.

The School Board will use this information to set goals through 2025. It is important work and we are grateful to those who contribute to this process. See page 4 for more.

As we look forward to the promise of better times, please take an opportunity to encourage and reassure students that the difficulties they have experienced during the pandemic are temporary. We will be successful by working together to overcome these challenges.

Community members invited to Board Goals 2025 Cafe Feb. 3

At the end of 2020, we asked community members to participate in a survey to help shape the School Board's – and district's – focus for the next five years. Now, we're inviting you to the next step in that process: a virtual Board Goals 2025 Cafe, from 6-8 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 3. Though we know it's a big ask for you to dedicate two hours on a weeknight, we hope you'll find it worth the investment.

About 3,450 parents/guardians, students, staff and community members completed the survey in November and December. They indicated that the top four areas that are most important for student success, and most in need of improvement are:

- Mental health support for students;

- Student & staff experiences regarding cultural understanding, diversity and equity;
- School climate and culture to build healthy relationships and effective collaboration and partnership;
- High expectations for student growth and academic success.

The cafe is the next strategy that we will use to understand what the district's stakeholders mean when they say they want an improvement in one of these areas for student success, said Dawn Wakeley, Executive Director of Teaching and Learning. Other strategies that may be used after the initial cafe include focus groups, listening sessions, cafe sessions on a specific topic, meetings with specific focus

groups such as the Equity Committee, Technology Advisory Committee or COVID-19 Task Force.

"I'm so excited," School Board member Tami Henkel said of the process. "This is the beginning of a beautiful thing that is going to be created collaboratively with our community."

During the cafe, those who attend will hear an introduction and welcome, then work together in Zoom breakout rooms.

We look forward to working with you



and connecting virtually at the cafe!
To reserve your seat at our virtual table, scan the QR code on this page, or use this link: bit.ly/TSDgoals2025cafe

Citizens Housing Advisory Committee will help create short & long-term plans

When school buildings were closed in March due to COVID-19, the district pushed pause on important work being done by the Citizens Housing Advisory Committee. That work will resume in the new year, with members studying how best to relieve crowding at some buildings, whether any slight adjustments or tweaks are needed for in-district attendance boundaries, and what the district's long-range student housing plans should include.

As part of the district's work to ensure that there are enough seats available for students at all schools:

- Portable classroom buildings were installed at Lake Wilderness Elementary, Rock Creek and

Glacier Park Elementary. (Tahoma Elementary had reached its enrollment capacity last school year, but has no more room for additional portable classrooms).

- The School Board recently approved a modular addition with bathrooms and water at Cedar River Elementary.
- Both TES and CRES had temporary staffing added to address overloaded classes in the 2020-2021 school year.

While the committee is examining how best to house students in the short-term, it is also working on a long-range plan, and will make recommendations to the School Board.

Public input will be sought as part of the process.

In January, TES Principal Jerry Gaston, who co-facilitates the committee, said, "Our end goal is really pretty simple: To decide how to house students in this growing and award-winning school district."

Before COVID-19 halted the committee's progress, members last year examined demographic data, projections, enrollment counts and other facts, as well as making site visits to schools to look at the current uses for different spaces – as an example, at Cedar River Elementary School, they saw the stage, which was being used as an art classroom, and the commons/lunchroom, where some of the Future Ready Foundations classes are taught.

They looked at access to restrooms, gyms, lunchrooms and common spaces during passing time. At each site, staff noted that storage is an issue; using Cedar River as an example again, the RAP program has books that many teachers need to access, but nowhere convenient to store them, so they are organized in file cabinets in a hallway. Overcrowding causes

problems in common spaces such as playgrounds, gyms and lunchrooms at many buildings, the committee noted. They are considering whether spaces can be used creatively.

The committee will need updated demographic information, current enrollment numbers, a report about any ideas on successful remote learning strategies that could potentially be helpful in the future, and information about planned new housing within the district. The district hopes to have new demographic data available in the next couple of months. Enrollment is down across the district, and dropping each month. In a survey, about half of the families who unenrolled their students said they either plan to return or would consider returning.

The committee, which includes students, parents/guardians, staff members and community members, was scheduled to meet on Jan. 25.

We will continue to update the community about the progress of the committee via our website and district newsletter. To sign up to receive our twice-monthly eNewsletter, use this link: bit.ly/TSDsignUpForNewsletter



Tahoma Community Report is produced by the Tahoma School District Communication Office and mailed to all school district residents four times a year. Contact the Communication Office by calling 425-413-3409 or by email to Kevin Patterson, communication director, at: kpatters@tahomasd.us

The Tahoma School District does not discriminate in any programs or activities on the basis of sex, race, creed, religion, color, national origin, age, veteran or military status, sexual orientation, gender expression or identity, disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups.

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Section 504 Coordinator

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Upcoming Board meetings

The Tahoma School Board of Directors invites you to join them at an upcoming Tahoma School Board meeting. For details about how to listen in to the live public meetings,

visit bit.ly/TSDschoolBoard. Dates of upcoming regular meetings include Feb. 9, Feb. 23, March 9, March 23, April 13, April 27.

Dates of upcoming work study sessions include Feb. 2, March 2, March 16, March 30 and April 20.