



OLD DONATION SCHOOL

HOME OF

BRICKELL ACADEMY

4633 HONEYGROVE ROAD · VIRGINIA BEACH VA 23455 · OFFICE: 757.648.3240 · FAX: 757.648.3265
SCHOOL COUNSELING DEPARTMENT: 757.648.3267 · FAX: 757.648.3266

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Dear Old Donation School (ODS) Families,

For nearly a month, I have worked with Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS) Departments of School Leadership and Teaching and Learning to organize a plan with two goals in mind. The first was to implement the safety mitigation strategies required of all schools due to COVID-19 and second to keep all ODS students in the ODS curriculum with an ODS teacher regardless of a parent's August decision of Option 1 or Option 2. In my opinion, every ODS child who has earned a place in this program deserves full access to the curriculum and instruction and trained staff of our school. These priorities necessitated the addition of staff, which have now been added.

My letter last week caused great anxiety and in some cases panic, and for that I am wholeheartedly sorry. Our hope was that time and our ongoing efforts would provide solutions, but that did not happen. Our efforts to configure and reconfigure staffing assignments and space utilization simply did not result in a plan that would keep everyone safe, keep every child in the ODS curriculum, and honor the requests of all parents who wanted their child to return face-to-face as soon as possible. Thus, the collaborative decision was made to hold the lottery. By giving families a chance to revisit their original options, I had hoped that we could fulfill the two goals of safety and access to the ODS curriculum and instruction while allowing families to make a choice. What resulted was a firestorm of anger, accusations, and feelings of distrust. As the principal of ODS, I apologize for any actions that resulted in more stress during a time when everyone is dealing with so much due to the stresses associated with the pandemic.

Over the weekend, I worked with my colleagues in School Leadership to determine how we can use the survey results and feedback from parents to welcome back all ODS families as soon as possible. That work continues with a few updates and points of clarification based on questions I received from many of you. For elementary grades, schedules were created based on class assignments which are random, we did place our Option 2 students throughout the grade level with the goal of adding a teacher and placing some in the class of the teacher who agreed to remain virtual. My request for an additional teacher was made as soon as we realized the need existed. With the addition of an elementary teacher at each grade as well as additional support from a GRT, we will move to invite five classes of second graders back to the building on September 29, 2020. With 101 families requesting face-to-face out of the 130 students at second grade, I am looking at other classroom areas throughout the building that could house more students and am more confident that we can place all Option 1 students across the five classrooms. If this does not occur based on survey results and additional seats in the new class or classrooms, I will merge any remaining Option 1 students into Mrs. Scott's class with option 2 students who will remain virtual until the end of January.

Right now, my priority is finding another second-grade teacher who can join our team.

The same numbers and configurations exist at grades three through five. With the survey results completed by the end of the day today, I will be able to plan for the face-to-face return of students by adding a teacher at each grade level and still keeping all health mitigation strategies in place and all ODS students in the ODS curriculum with an ODS teacher. The impact could involve a change in teacher placement among a smaller group of students as I make the adjustments to honor as many parent requests as possible. You see, the goal was never to be secretive or withhold information, but to keep everyone safe in the ODS curriculum with an ODS teacher and that work simply took time. Again, my sincerest apology for everyone who felt misled or angry. Tomorrow morning, I hope to send a final communication to any affected family in grades 2-5.

At middle school, teams have always been and continue to be developed based on two factors: (1) required courses that include English, mathematics, social studies, science, a world language, and for grades 6 and 7, health and physical education, and (2) electives options. This year, we built our teams the same way we always have with one exception: we placed our Option 2 students on the team that agreed to remain virtual. Keep in mind that at the time we built schedules, we were in red/red according to the health metrics approved by the School Board in August. We developed the schedule to meet the requirements of the school division (e.g., change to 4x4, class size parameters), and with the primary goal of keeping all ODS students in the ODS curriculum with an ODS teacher. The breakdown of options by parents at the middle school level mirrored those of elementary. Of the 275 students at grade six, 205 families chose option 1 leaving 79 option 1 students without a seat under health mitigation strategies in place and another 69 students who chose option 2 without ODS curriculum or an ODS teacher if we built the schedule in any other manner. We did our best and that meant putting every child on a middle school team to begin the school year on time. I know from the communications since Thursday that many families felt we should have done things differently, and I appreciate your input and your suggestions. Please know that our work focused on the goals of meeting division conditions and timelines and honoring student schedule requirements and needs to the extent possible.

The team structure at ODS is a core component of our academic program. In grade 6, all students who asked for face-to-face instruction across the three teams will return on October 8. Our sixth-grade teachers are willing to teach face-to-face with students present and virtually with those who selected Option 2. While we must adjust teams to achieve optimal numbers of students on each team, all core and elective offerings will remain consistent. In addition, we will not be dividing teams or bringing students at grade 7 or 8 back to the building until we can safely bring all members of the grade level to ODS. For now, we are waiting on the final numbers in the survey and planning to continue the same high quality, engaging curriculum, instruction, and assessment at ODS. No middle school students across grades sixth, seventh, or eighth grade will experience a change in schedule or teacher assignment until we are able to bring the entire grade level back to the building. We will continue to work towards a safe return for all middle school students and staff to face-to-face instruction, and I am hopeful the results of the survey will provide us with opportunity to make shifts for those folks for whom remaining virtual makes the most sense at this time. Moving any child out of the ODS curriculum and into the general education program at the Virtual Learning Center are not options we can, in good conscience, entertain.

In closing, you have my sincere apology for any action on my part that resulted in more stress or worry for any family. I have spent eight years building this community and the last thing I would ever want to do is anything that resulted in many of the communications I have received since Thursday. I will continue to work with leaders in the Departments of School Leadership and Teaching and Learning to ensure that all of our students continue to have full access to the curriculum and instruction at ODS, to keep students and staff safe, and to honor the wishes of all families to the fullest extent possible.

Respectfully,

Kelly A. Hedrick, Ed.D.

