

The Nokesville School

12375 Aden Road
Nokesville, VA 20181

August 8, 2023

Dear Nokesville Families,

This email letter is intended to provide an update on an addition of learning cottages this year that affects fifth-grade and eighth-grade students and staff.

New Learning Cottages

The enrollment in 2015 when TNS opened was about 800 students. As the population in our area has grown, our school enrollment has also increased over time, and The Nokesville School is now considered significantly overcapacity, with current enrollment being about 1,200 students.

To accommodate this growth, we've added learning cottages, also known as trailers, to provide additional classrooms for students. Learning cottages in PWCS, and many growing school divisions like ours, are commonly used when the main building has run out of space for instruction. Last year, four learning cottages were added behind the school to accommodate fifth-grade classes. This summer, four more learning cottages were added alongside the ones added last year.

For this upcoming school year, all five fifth-grade homeroom classes, fifth-grade strings, eighth-grade Civics & Economics (Mr. Walton), and eighth-grade Mathematics (Mr. Unger) will be housed in the learning cottages.

Room Assignments

The decision to assign classes to these cottages was made thoughtfully, with input from our staff members. At the end of the school year, we held a voluntary staff work session, with about 30 staff in attendance, to help make the decisions for changes in room assignments for the upcoming year. Since we are growing in all grade levels, we have challenges in space at both the elementary and middle-level areas.

Class reduction is a major goal for us to improve the classroom environment and experience for both our students and teachers. When we lower class size, which I'm pleased to say we have been able to do this year, the natural side effect is that we then must ensure we have the rooms and space for the new classes.

At the elementary level, we added classes for kindergarten, first, and fourth-grades. For the most part, all of the kindergarten through fourth-grade rooms are similar in location. We will have some of the second-grade classrooms on the second floor of the elementary wing this year. When deciding which classes would need to be in the learning cottages, the fifth-grade teachers volunteered to continue having their classes together in

the learning cottages. They felt that it made the transitions more efficient for students and would lose less instructional time, since they departmentalize, or switch teachers for different subjects. Fifth grade is also the oldest grade level of students at the elementary level.

At the middle level, classes are handled differently than at the elementary level. In the middle level, we assign courses once we have student course requests. Then the master schedule dictates how many rooms and sections of courses we need. We decided to assign two eighth-grade classes to the learning cottages due to the students being the oldest and, hopefully, most responsible in our school. They are being taught and supervised by two experienced PWCS teachers.

At both levels, there are classes that cannot be placed in the learning cottages due to the special needs of the students or specialized equipment used for instruction, such as Family & Consumer Science or Art Class.

Safety and Support

It's vital that we ensure a safe and supportive environment for students and staff throughout our building and in our leaning cottages. We are in the process of equipping each one with all the necessary resources for effective teaching and learning, such as desks, chairs, teacher desks, and interactive whiteboards. We are also working to add overall improvements such as a new sidewalk, decorations, raised flower beds, and a picnic table outdoor classroom area. For staff, we are improving the nearby staff lounge to include a teacher workroom area that is more convenient for the staff in that location of the building.

We understand any concerns about having students outside the main building. As a TNS parent myself, I empathize with this feeling. We began using the learning cottages last year and discussed similar concerns, but over time, we heard positive feedback from staff, students, and parents about the experience. Like last year, all students that attend class in learning cottages will enter and exit school through the main doors. They will go through the new Evolv magnetometers. Students will come back into the building for all of their other classes and lunch.

Additionally, we have hired a Security Assistant, alongside our Safety and Security Specialist, to have regular perimeter checks and monitor safety with new high-definition cameras with a live feed of the area. They will also provide specialized training for our staff and students for all of our regular emergency procedures. Finally, we have multiple methods of communication to the learning cottages, including two-way radios and telephones. This year they have also added an in-ground high speed internet to ensure a quality network for our students every day.

Planning for the Future

Each fall, during the PWCS Capital Improvement Programs planning process, all schools are evaluated for their anticipated ability to house projected student enrollment, based on newly calculated, 10-year projections. The PWCS Planning and Financial Services

Department will continue to evaluate student enrollment projection trends at The Nokesville School as our enrollment continues to increase. We will notify you of any changes that they recommend or plan for us moving forward.

If you have any questions or concerns about the learning cottages or any other matters related to the school, please feel free to call us at (571) 781-3040. We are committed to working together with you to overcome these challenges. We will continue to let you know of any additional updates. Thank you for your continued support and collaboration.

Sincerely,

Andrew M. Jacks, Ed.D

Principal

The Nokesville School