



Salish Coast Elementary School features a lot of glass to let in the light and a bit of solar heating. The cafeteria area/gathering place welcomed students and parents who took time for a quick snack before classes began Tuesday morning. (Jeannie McMacken/Peninsula Daily News)

# New elementary school opens in Port Townsend

by Jeannie McMacken

Wednesday, September 12, 2018 1:30am

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PORT TOWNSEND — As the sun broke through a cloudy sky on Tuesday, students and their parents arrived at the new Salish Coast Elementary School on Grant Street.

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They biked, walked and carpooled; some children came by bus. There were plenty of giggles and hugs for friends and teachers.

Many spoke of how big and bright Salish Coast seemed. Large glass windows let in the streaming light, warming the concrete floors. Lining the corridors are 591 empty cubbies awaiting coats and backpacks and art projects to take home.

Principal Lisa Condran, wearing a wrist corsage, was outside the entrance greeting everyone with a wide smile.

"I'm so happy to have kids and teachers in the classrooms of our beautiful new school. It's a wonderful day," Condran said.

Inside, scurrying kids were looking for their rooms, staff guiding the way. When the first bell sounded, chaos became calm and the teaching began. At that moment, no one seemed to mind that the school year began one week late.

Salish Coast Elementary replaces Grant Street Elementary School, which was sited next door at 1637 Grant St., and which was demolished over the summer. It had served the students of Port Townsend for 61 years.

The new \$28.1 million, 68,000-square-foot building houses students from kindergarten through fifth grade. Construction began on the new school in June 2017.

Classes at Salish Coast were postponed because of a labor strike that began Aug. 21. Members of the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 302 reached a tentative agreement and returned to work on Friday.

Progress was made over the weekend to the site's concrete and paving projects, including parking areas, sidewalks for ADA access and a fire safety zone. Fencing will keep construction zones contained, officials said, and children will not be outside unsupervised.

ohn Polm, Port Townsend School superintendent, expects full completion of construction, other than the garden, by the end of November. The garden will be planted in the late winter.

‘We are certainly in sight of the finish line,” he said.

‘Walkways and hand rails are our priority in the courtyard. We want to increase access by finishing up the walkway between wings so students will not need to pass through the library to get from wing to wing. That area should be finished within two weeks or so,” he said, adding that the courtyard will be completed in mid-November.

‘There are a number of unfinished items such as striping for Discovery Road, playground striping, a gate for the fire lane, and fencing around the preschool play area,” Polm added, saying he does not have a timeline for completion.

Polm said there were a few glitches on the first day of school.

‘As with any new facility, we will be attending to any items that are not functioning properly. The elevator needed attention today, and it is now fully functional and ready to use. In the library, we are waiting for an order correction as we received incorrect shelving for part of the library.”

Port Townsend city officials gave the school district a temporary building occupancy permit Monday. Last week, teachers were allowed to enter the building during limited hours to unpack boxes of books and supplies and set up rooms.

‘Our teachers and staff have done a tremendous job getting school ready, even with these additional challenges,” Polm said. “I am very proud of the way they have come together to support each other through the process.”

One of the changes affecting the school district is food service. For the next few weeks, Blue Heron Middle School’s central kitchen will provide breakfast and lunch for Salish students.

‘Food service is delayed as the kitchen work gets finished up,’ Polm said. ‘At this time we expect work to be completed in about two weeks, and then the health department will inspect the kitchen in operation. Once that is done, our staff will have access and will begin using the new equipment. We anticipate using the kitchen as our central kitchen in about 4 weeks.’

The district’s intention is to incorporate fresh fruits and vegetables, some from the planned kitchen garden, and local beef and fish, into the daily meals. Everything will be prepared in-house, from the muffins to the salad dressings.

Loretta Sachs, project manager, and Shannon Payton, former project designer from Integrus Architecture, took a walk through the space on opening day to see it filled with students.

‘I’m amazed with the way the kids reacted and how this building supports education,’ Sachs said. ‘The cornerstone of the district’s plan is place-based education, and this school is grounded to the site and to the community.’

Outside, volunteers had placed fresh bark on the playground. Work was being done on a log seating area, the wood harvested from the old cedars that were removed during site preparation. Other workers in orange vests continued on with their jobs.

Caroline Ruth, the parent of a first grader, strapped on her bike helmet after taking her child to class, ready to ride off to begin her day.

‘This school is so beautiful, I’m almost in tears,’ Ruth said. ‘It’s so fortunate that this community supports kids.’

As of opening day, enrollment stood at 498 students. Kindergarten students’ first day of school will be Thursday and Friday for half-day sessions. Full days, from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., will begin Monday.

A virtual tour of the school can be found at <http://salishcoast.ptschools.org>.



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Alish Coast Elementary School in Port Townsend held its first classes Tuesday. Along with students and parents, workers were on campus to continue construction. A strike that stopped work was settled last Friday which allowed concrete sidewalks to be poured and a fire lane to be installed. In addition to outside work including landscaping, some interior work is still being completed. School officials say the work should be wrapped up by the end of November. (Jeannie McMacken/PeninsulaDailyNews)



alish Coast Elementary students line up outside their new classroom during the first day of school Tuesday. (Jeannie McMacken/Peninsula Daily News)





First- and second-grade teachers Peter Braden and Dorothy Stengel ask their students what they like about their new school. (Jeannie McMacken/Peninsula Daily News)



he courtyard is still under construction at Salish Coast Elementary School. It will be gated, landscaped and include several outdoor learning spaces. It will also have a “mud room” that will allow students to lean off their shoes after a walk around campus. (Jeannie McMacken/Peninsula Daily News)

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