



SAHUARITA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT #30

350 W. Sahuarita Road, Building 10

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Office of the Superintendent

April 19, 2018

Dear Colleagues:

If you are like me, you've been pondering the different issues currently swirling around our State pertaining to our special profession. They include staff compensation, education funding, walk-ins, possible work stoppages, the Governor's proposed funding plan, and retention of staff.

I merely want to convey some of my thoughts. The purpose is so that, as your superintendent, you know where I stand.

First, I feel like one of the most blessed school system leaders in America. Through our professional, tirelessly dedicated staff, and amazing community, our students are achieving success at remarkable levels. Almost every day, I hear examples of how our students and staff are being distinguished for excellence. This includes academic competitions, fine arts festivals, CTE Skills USA competitions, state level science fairs, NJROTC leadership skills competitions, and interscholastic athletics. I never cease to be humbled by the tireless dedication, sacrifice, and selfless commitment to the success of our students on the part of our Team SUSD. I often leave my office late in the evening, and see the lights on our fields, with our coaches working with student athletes, or watching a teacher walking to his/her car with a crate full of materials, papers and supplies, that will likely require attention even on that same evening.

Second, I want to acknowledge that the funding issues we face are real, and the points that have been articulated by current teacher advocacy efforts are relevant. This includes the relative status of Arizona in the National public education investment picture, and prevailing large scale budget cuts over the last several years. Again, the conservative approximation of this lost revenue in SUSD #30 is about \$20M total, over the last eight years or so. Compensation for educators has remained relatively flat, especially in contrast to the cost of living. Meanwhile, the cost of postsecondary education, and associated student loans, has risen exponentially in this same time period. This has created a challenging landscape in regards to recruiting and retaining quality, professional and student centered staff to deliver our vision of educational excellence and mission of student success.

Third, it is important to cite the positively trending direction of understanding and support for the fact that excellent public education is vital to the prosperity, economic vitality, and overall quality of life in our State. Some of these signs include the Legislative continuance of Proposition 301, and relatively higher pass rates of bonds and overrides across the State last fall. There is currently a funding plan, proposed by Governor Ducey, and being considered by the Legislature, to invest significantly more dollars in public education. I acknowledge and understand that there are some thoughtful questions about the details, mechanism, and long term sustainability of that plan. However, the fact that this plan is being debated acknowledges the



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issue which we are raising, that our public schools need greater investments to deliver the outcomes that I believe we all agree our State desires and deserves. I admit that the details are still unclear, and uncertain, but will say that we'll continue our commitment to prioritize the investment in our greatest resource, all of our people, to the greatest extent possible. An example is the recent approval of a four percent (4%) compensation raise for all employees. This was not strategically easy, but does provide a tangible indicator of this organizational priority.

That brings me to the issue of the looming possibility of a work stoppage of some form. I've met and had honest and respectful conversations with liaisons of the #RedForEd movement from most of our schools. I respect the sincere points of view of others, including the teachers with whom I've recently talked. However, I personally and professionally do not support a work stoppage for several reasons, and present some of the basic points. Again, this is just my opinion and point of view:

- As public servants, we serve a high and noble purpose, the education of young people. Even with relevant cause, creating a disruption of this responsibility seems counter to that mission.
- The rising momentum in public support for further investment in public education may be compromised when we create such a disruption in a critical public service, namely the education of young people.
- By its very nature, a strike is divisive. In my own life and career here in Pima County, I'm familiar with a handful of well documented strikes, including two in an educational setting, and still hear stories about how divisive it was, and how difficult it was to come back as a cohesive and unified team. That is counter to our general community and organizational culture, and I worry about such residual impacts upon our norms and values.
- Besides the general disruption in the educational process, I've had many good questions about logistics and contingencies. Some of them include use of sick leave, working if a given employee chooses not to participate in a work stoppage, need to make up instructional days, potential impacts upon families with commencement, promotion, end of year school events, and family plans after the close of the year. These unfortunate possibilities are stressful to the staff, and also to the families that we serve.
- The trust of those we serve is critical to ongoing support and positive growth of our programs and overall trajectory. I am concerned that a strike action may detrimentally impact that level of trust.



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I understand that the #RedForEd group is currently taking a vote across the State, in regards to a possible work stoppage. I am honest in saying that I hope that a vote to strike does not happen. However, if it does happen that we are involved in such an action, I am fully committed to open communication, creation of clarity, and sharing of information, in support of what I know we share, that which is ultimately best for students. Although an important objective is to keep schools open, I will do so upon clarity of a plan to make sure we will have adequate resources to maintain viable operations. It is also important to be able to provide accurate and clear communication to our parents if and when this occurs. Our honest and shared communication is critical to support these outcomes. Additionally, as clarity emerges, and as needed, we will continue to communicate with all of you in regards to any specific, factual details and information about some of these frequently asked questions, including human resources related inquiries, to which specific answers have not yet been determined.

I remain hopeful and optimistic that our State, and local District, can continue to focus our ongoing, intentional, and shared efforts to fill in the large funding deficits and together build a sustainable, long term plan toward appropriate public investments to further support a great public school system, high quality educational outcomes, and corresponding overall prosperity and success of our wonderful State.

I do hope that this information is somewhat helpful in creating clarity and understanding about my thinking and honest viewpoints about these critical issues. In the end, I know that we will work through this current situation, and remain relentlessly focused on advancing our vision of excellence, and mission of working together as a team to help every student succeed. Together, we will continue to make a difference!

Sincerely,

Manuel O. Valenzuela, Ed.D.
Superintendent