



## SAHUARITA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

June 8, 2020

Dear Sahuarita Family:

Undoubtedly, the toughest question posed to any school superintendent in America this summer is, “What is the plan for opening school in the Fall?” We are teachers. We desire to build a thoughtful and well-analyzed lesson plan for any objective. However, this year is different. The landscape of things is cloudy in so many ways, including infection rates, public perceptions, swirling ideas, CDC guidance, associated details, legal requirements, distance curriculum, financial variables, attendance, and planning to support the individual needs of potential sick or high-risk students and staff.

The purpose of this update is twofold. First, I wish to update you about our process to return. I call it the Road Back. Second, I'd like to update you about what is currently in place right now. My senior leadership team and I have been managing the pandemic matter since it emerged in March. At this point, we are adding representative subgroups, from diverse stakeholders, including teaching faculty, administrative staff, operation services, support staff, and parents. During this month, our senior staff will be meeting with each group, talking about the issues, different options, and gathering feedback about the relative strengths and possible concerns of each one. We are collecting survey input from all employee team members about the issues important to them, in support of safety and helping advance our educational mission of student success. Similarly, we will be sharing a request for feedback, in survey form, from all of our parents. This should be sent to you within the next couple of weeks. Again, we wish to know your feelings about what factors are most important to you in preparation for starting school. At the beginning of July, we hope to provide the final draft of this work, in terms of specific plans, and options. This will likely include an array of specific options and contingencies, and the clear understanding that the plan may need to change as variables and public health data emerge over time. Our vision is that we will have a plan for a myriad of contingencies, and they will be as specific and clear as possible.

Currently, I can tell you about some action steps that are advancing for fall of the 2020-2021 school year. We have now implemented procedures and routines for return to physical offices this summer for 12 month employees. This process includes a flexible in-person work schedule, use of face coverings in common indoor spaces, daily temperature checks, and increased and deeper cleaning protocols. It also included voluntary diagnostic COVID-19 testing for all 12 month employees. Over 60% of our twelve month employees took advantage of this opportunity, even

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with only two days notice. For the fall, there are explicit and specific protocols for cleaning of high touch surfaces, in classrooms and around campus, and other operations, including playgrounds, cafeterias, and school buses. These surfaces include desks, light switches, doorknobs, phones, desks, playground equipment, sinks, toilets, proximate walls, and food service lines. Furthermore, these surfaces will be sanitized at least three (3) times daily, and even more, such as before and after each run on the school buses or lunch.

We are also in the middle of evaluating procedures and routines to further support safe practices that minimize the likelihood of spreading any respiratory illness. These include daily handwashing norms, signage, marked pathways around campus to help support flow which minimizes unnecessary contact, social distancing markers, the teaching of procedures and routines, and installation of plastic shields in the high traffic office areas. We will be ready to take employee temperatures each day. Some of the practices that we are designing may not necessarily be ideal, but we must be ready and prepared to implement them, if needed, to support the safe opening of schools. For example, our task force and committees will be exploring a hybrid reopening model, specifically to support distancing requirements. This might include a schedule where half of a class' students physically attend the school building on a given day or week, while the other classmates are working on a project or independent learning activities at home. Again, this effort must include building the biggest "playbook" possible, even knowing that we may not have to run all of the plays. Furthermore, this may only be necessary for the beginning of the year to assess the new practice effectiveness, evaluate enrollment numbers and procedures, and study real-time updated infection rates and COVID-19 status reports. Additionally, we are working with the United Community Health Center (UCHC) to continue and formally establish a testing protocol. Much public health guidance has been given about the value of testing in the overall plan to keep people healthy. We will plan to test all faculty and staff again, prior to the start of the school year, and regularly, as recommended and able, to support systematic screening. Furthermore, we are working together to establish a protocol to immediately address the needs of any student or staff member that exhibits symptoms of illness, to support testing. This will help rule out COVID-19 or to quickly isolate cases in further support of managing the potential for spread.

As you can tell, there are a myriad of moving parts, that are rather interconnected, changing, and also dependent upon other factors. For example, you may have seen the Guidance from the Arizona Department of Education this past week. Several of these same issues were addressed. However, some of them, like a hybrid plan or a management plan to remove students for ten days or more to address spread, will require substantive shifts in how school attendance and funding

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are administered. School and policy leaders across the State are working on quickly clarifying some of these norms. For example, one objective is to expand and further develop a distance learning program, which will allow us to offer temporary online instruction, based upon individual family health circumstance, or perhaps as needed to isolate a small group of students at a school while a case of illness is managed, traced, and the facility is cleaned. We are working very hard to be ready for this scenario and expanding the robustness and structure of our distance learning model, but it is dependent on other factors as well.

In summary, I wish to stress to all of you how committed we are to re-opening our schools, safely, effectively, and with methodical attention and fidelity to established and reinforced norms and procedures to support the well being of all. From here, the steps to that goal are the survey data which we will collect, the engagement process with stakeholder group representatives, and the synthesis of this information with guidance from local, State, and Federal referent authorities. By the beginning of July, we will issue concrete operating norms and possible contingencies. We will be ready to meet our duty in service to our students and community. And, it will be done in a reasonable and prudent way that supports safety first, and creative solutions to the challenges at hand. Indeed, patience and flexibility will be paramount and key to help us navigate through these waters. However, with your help, we will succeed in our educational mission, and keep our students, staff, and families safe.

Sincerely,

Manuel O. Valenzuela, Ed. D.  
Superintendent

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