



SAHUARITA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

December 11, 2020

Dear Sahuarita Family:

The purpose of this letter is to provide updated information regarding matters pertaining to the ongoing pandemic.

From the beginning, we've been striving to make intentional decisions based upon three major considerations: public health metrics, counsel from corresponding authorities, and evaluation of our local situation. At this point, the numbers have continued to rise over the last few weeks.

We have strived to follow the metrics. This week, the disease numbers have reached a level of approximately 360 per 100,000. Anything over 100 is considered a substantial spread, or red on the dashboard. The testing positivity number has reached an average of about 12% over the last two weeks. This also corresponds with a red designation. Yesterday, the remaining disease indicator, hospitalization for COVID like illness, has reached a level of 10%, and it is anticipated to remain at this level or above next week. Thus, by next Thursday, December 17, 2020, the public health experts anticipate that all three metrics will reach the red level for a second week.

The Pima County Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Francisco Garcia, has been supportive of schools operating under the hybrid model up to the present point. Yesterday, I received a letter from Dr. Garcia. He cited emerging data patterns and foreseeable trends for the near future. Dr. Garcia conveys the data cited in this letter and projects that this situation will persist and again report all three disease metrics in the red zone next Thursday, December 17, 2020. Furthermore, he conveys that, at that point, the Pima County Health Department recommends that schools consider a return to full remote learning.

Locally, we continue to effectively implement a mitigation plan, which has significantly supported the successful management of in-person hybrid instruction and District operations for the overwhelming majority of this semester. However, in recent days, as community spread and corresponding numbers have risen, it has become increasingly challenging to manage cases in an ideal way. Furthermore, recent experiences suggest that these challenges are further magnified around holiday periods. For example, right after the recent Thanksgiving holiday, the tracking and tracing team was faced with eighteen (18) cases to manage. On an average weekend in previous weeks, the average was about five (5).

In summary, this situation continues to be uncertain, dynamic and rapidly changing. In consideration of all of these indicators, and in a desire to provide timely communication prior to the holiday season, **I am now giving notice of the Sahuarita Unified School District's movement to full remote learning for the first two weeks of the second semester, specifically from January 4-15, 2021, for all K-12th grade students.** The Early Childhood

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Center and the L.I.N.K. program will be closed during this timeframe. Onsite learning services will continue. Please know that this determination was not made lightly. I understand that in-person learning is the best model for most children and that there are important considerations and concerns when operating in full remote learning. That is why we were among the first districts in Pima County to launch in-person hybrid learning and corresponding programs. However, the preponderance of evidence suggests that this is the reasonable and prudent step to take at this particular point in time.

This intentional step will support safety by providing time for the disease metrics to retreat to a more manageable level. Second, it will provide the District tracking and tracing team time to thoroughly manage cases still pending over the holiday break, and help minimize the likelihood of infections from permeating the schoolhouse gate. We also wait for the anticipated start of vaccination programs in Southern Arizona. We must climb this mountain to help reset the situation for long term resumption of hybrid, and eventually full, in-person learning. Barring any further developments, it is anticipated and hoped that in-person hybrid learning can resume after the Dr. Martin Luther King holiday, specifically on Tuesday, January 19, 2021. In the words of Dr. King, "Sometimes, we must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope."

I wish you a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and everything that represents hope, goodwill, and the spirit of the season.

Sincerely,

Manuel O. Valenzuela, Ed.D.
Superintendent

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