



## SAHUARITA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

September 1, 2020

Dear Sahuarita Families:

The new school year is now in its fourth week, and I want to thank you for the patience, support, and sacrifice in making this challenging start the best that it can be. I've witnessed firsthand the extraordinary efforts on the part of school leaders, faculty members, staff, parents, and students to make this as successful as possible. In fact, teachers are teaching and students are learning. I'm proud that we've been able to offer families multiple programmatic options for the 2020-21 school year. Nonetheless, one conclusion I've clearly determined is that our great model of public education truly works best when we are able to convene, to the greatest extent possible, in person. We are striving with resolve to get back to that point just as soon and safely as possible.

We now have the [State](#) and [County](#) dashboards, which give local school districts with measures to consider in making return to school determinations. Our SUSD Governing Board has consistently supported a balanced, methodical, and steady approach to this effort. We neither wish to get ahead of the metrics nor remain static, despite data-based indicators.

Last week, the dashboard had an infection rate of 89 per 100,000, in the range for yellow. The standard is less than one hundred cases OR a two week decline. Likewise, the hospitalization rate for COVID 19 symptoms was 2.5%, also in relatively good standing. The standard is two consecutive weeks with hospitalization rates for COVID-like illness less than 10%. However, the testing positivity rate was still in the red. The standard with this indicator is two consecutive weeks of positivity rates less than 7%. Last week, the number was 6.2%, but it has only been under 7% for one week.

Therefore, when the dashboard shifts to the yellow/moderate level, we will take steps to proceed toward a modified in-person opening, often called hybrid. **If that level is achieved this week, the target date for the first day of in-person, hybrid learning is September 17, 2020.** We will consult our final plans with the County Health Department, double-check our health and hygiene mitigation plans, solidify instructional readiness, and further refine procedures and routines. We also want to analyze the trends and solidify, as much as possible, a distinctive, emerging trend. The focus is upon moving slowly, steadily, and with great attention to detail. We want to move, step by step, forward with the objective of doing everything possible to keep everyone safe, and to prevent a need to retreat back to fully online learning for all. This will be a true team effort, requiring personal responsibility, patience, and self-discipline among all of us.

Again, the yellow indicator suggests a possible move to hybrid. Our principal leadership team has refined the details of their respective plans. These will be communicated from your respective schools and posted on the [Road Back website page](#). The basic plan includes students being split

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into two groups, “A” and “B,” by alphabet last name. The “A” group will attend school on Monday and Tuesday, and the “B” group will attend Thursday and Friday. Students will continue, as they are now, with remote learning during their days away from campus. Likewise, Wednesday will be remote learning for all, to support site-based cleaning, individualized and special meetings, and also to provide teachers professional training and preparation time. The objective is to lower class sizes to support maximizing physical distance in the classroom, and similar operating norms. The goal is also to use this time in hybrid learning for additional refinement of operational procedures, in preparation for a full return, foreseeably when the dashboard turns green. It is a temporary time of transition where we will all continue to sacrifice but are glad about the opportunity to move to in-person learning.

As part of this approach to starting slow and steady, and striving for success in incremental steps, we anticipate beginning with the K-5 grades first. The reason is that the structure of the elementary grades is more static, self-contained, and easier to manage from a distancing and cohorting point of view. We want to deploy the many procedures and routines with confidence and success, before rolling out the secondary schools, which operate with more variable and complex structures. Again, the mindset is “slow and steady wins the race.” It is envisioned that, after establishing the elementary return to in-person learning, we will move to integrate in-person learning for middle and high schools, ideally within about two weeks of opening the elementary schools. Of course, all of this is dependent upon the overall favorable trends in the dashboard.

The academic program will be a meaningful extension of what is happening today. All students in traditional school programs will have a chance to attend school each week, albeit for two days. The big step will be that direct instruction, currently taking place in front of a computer, will take place in person. For now, the aspects of remote learning will still require that students and teachers navigate some remote learning, flipped instruction, guided, and independent practice. However, it is hoped that the additional teacher contact, and strides to normalcy, will further support student academic success. It is still not perfect, but rather the next step on the road back. I appreciate the sacrifice that our teachers continue to make, along with our parents and students, with instructional planning, delivery, and support. Please keep in mind that this hybrid step is a temporary, necessary step on the road back, as opposed to a final destination. Our shared sacrifices, and personal responsibility with disease prevention norms, will yield positive fruit, and get us back to the full normal space as soon as possible.

Together, we have worked really hard to prepare for this next step. Although the uncertainty of it all does create a little apprehension in all of us, I am confident that, with each of us doing our part, we will move successfully to this next step. All aspects of our mitigation and academic plan are on the [Road Back page](#) of our website.

As I drove to work this week, I heard an old country song that resonated with me and this journey.

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The artist is Ricky Van Shelton. It is a song about a father teaching his son to drive and it gives a metaphor for life. The song says, "Keep your hands on the wheel, believe in the things that are real. Take your time, and keep it between the lines." We will not stray beyond either of the lines in the road and, by keeping it between the lines, continue to make a forward motion to our destination of a return to normalcy and our mission of working as a team to help every student succeed.

Sincerely,

Manuel O. Valenzuela, Ed.D.  
Superintendent

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