



SAHUARITA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

January 8, 2021

Dear Sahuarita Family:

Happy New Year! I hope that all of you are healthy and well. The purpose of this letter is to provide an update and share additional determinations and action steps in regards to the ongoing pandemic. First, as we move through the first days of the new semester, I express my sincere gratitude to our students, staff, and families for the total team effort to launch full remote learning with quality, instructional effectiveness, responsive service, and success.

As you are likely aware, this continues to be a very fluid and dynamic situation. Furthermore, the empirical data at the moment is simply problematic. Yesterday, I read multiple news reports citing that Arizona has the worst infection rates in the world. First, I'd like to share this week's disease metrics dashboard for Pima County. For comparison, I present it with a reference to the previously high numbers in December, which prompted the decision to return to remote learning, the current educational model.

Indicator	Dec. 10, 2020	Jan 7, 2021	Criteria for "substantial spread"
Infection rate (per 100,000)	360	551	>100
Test positivity rate (%)	12	19.9	>10
Hospitalization rate (%)	10	15.2	>10

An additional criterion for decision making is the professional advice and counsel of the referent health authorities. Until late in the fall, just before the winter break, the Pima County Health Department (PCHD) supported our hybrid instruction, even as infection numbers rose, because we have effective mitigation strategies, and we understand that, generally, the closer we can get to in-person learning, the better for most students. I have had multiple recent conversations with Dr. Francisco Garcia, Pima County Chief Medical Officer. He continues to be supportive and empathizes with our desire to move back to some form of in-person learning but counsels that it just does not seem like an action that they can endorse during the month of January 2021. Dr. Garcia shared that the numbers are just too high. Dr. Garcia acknowledged that a full return to the yellow and green zones of the dashboard might be somewhat distant, but that he would at least like to see a general trend downward in the numbers.

In light of this updated information and in commitment to provide timely decision making and communication, I would like to convey the following determinations:

First, the Sahuarita Unified School District will extend the current full remote learning model through the end of the month, January 31, 2021.

Office of the Superintendent

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Second, we have targeted to implement a phased return to hybrid learning, beginning on February 1, 2021. Of course, this plan is based upon the anticipation that numbers will flatten somewhat and begin to move downward, and the general endorsement of the County Health Department. I sincerely believe that those are viable possibilities but, as has become the norm, we must always be ready to monitor and adjust.

The phased action plan is to return grades K-5th to hybrid learning on February 1, 2021, followed by grades 6th-8th on February 8, 2021, and then grades 9th-12th on February 15, 2021. This timing and stairstep approach correlates with our local data of infection numbers and trends at the different levels. According to our data dashboard, the total numbers of resolved and current cases are forty-five (45) at the high school level, and twenty-seven (27) for all of the other K-8 serving schools, combined. Furthermore, Dr. Garcia concurred about the general differences with infection levels and counseled that this sort of tiered return to school is rational and appropriate.

On a related note, you may have heard that the County is preparing to move into Phase 1B of the vaccination program within the next two (2) weeks. This group includes the K-12 education sector, which includes our SUSD #30 staff. Furthermore, I am proud and grateful for the strong and ongoing collaboration which we have with Dr. Rudy Jimenez and the good folks at the United Community Health Center (UCHC). Together, we are already identifying employee team members who wish to take the vaccine and building a plan to vaccinate as many of our employees as possible, in a timely and expedient manner. This is expected to be another significant step in our methodical Road Back action plan.

In summary, by multiple indicators, where we find ourselves is arguably a relatively dark day in this pandemic journey. Indeed, the facts of the present moment do require us to continue to exercise strong self-discipline, extra sacrifice, and patience in our daily actions, educational learning environments, and life in general. However, there are some reasons for optimism, to believe that we are at a turning point in the journey, one where we can reasonably anticipate a meaningful shift in the right direction. The English theologian and historian Thomas Fuller once wrote, "It is said that the darkest hour of night comes just before the dawn." I am hopeful that the darkest days of this pandemic are soon behind us, and that the light of dawn will continue to illuminate our world, one step at a time, on this journey.

Respectfully,

Manuel O. Valenzuela, Ed.D.
Superintendent

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