



SAHUARITA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

August 24, 2022

Dear Sahuarita Families:

The 2022-23 school year is underway and moving full speed ahead! When folks ask me how it is going, I say it is one of the most successful and also one of the most challenging starts, at the same time. It gives me much joy to walk the campuses and see schools operating basically like normal, for the first time in 2 ½ years! It is great to visit classrooms and observe active instruction, student engagement, and general school operations as we remember them. Playgrounds are full of joyful activity, and after school sports are in full swing. The sounds of marching bands practicing for the fall season are music to my ears. Yet, like in many other sectors, life in 2022 has challenges that we must navigate. These include staffing, logistics, and supply chain issues.

Enrollment Increase

As of last week, we have 6,349 students enrolled in SUSD #30. That is a 2.6% increase from the end of the last year. We are launching a new State-funded \$18M construction initiative to expand high school facility capacity, at both Walden Grove HS and Sahuarita HS. This will include new classroom space, Career and Technical Education (CTE) facilities, and improvement in physical education facilities.

Community Conversation

This year, we will be hosting Community Conversations about important topics and issues. The first one on September 21 will be about the critical topic of school safety. We will have a panel of school, law enforcement, EMS, emergency planning, mental health, and other safety leaders. We will provide an update about our safety plan and associated action steps. For example, this fall, all schools will install an emergency access system that requires personal contact before an individual is let into the school front office. Additionally, this fall, we will begin community outreach regarding facility and capital outlay improvements and needs at all schools. We will continue striving to be proactive in planning, building and maintaining high quality schools and programs to deliver the mission of success for every student, in this complex and rapidly changing world.

Renewal of M&O and DAA Measures

This Fall, many items will appear on our midterm election ballot. Two of them are the renewal of our SUSD Maintenance and Operations (M&O) and District Additional Assistance (DAA) measures, known as Proposition 492 and 493. Please take the time to read the voter pamphlet. Furthermore, the informational presentation is posted on the SUSD website. In a nutshell, this measure is not new. It is a continuation of a long-running local investment in programs like K-12 school

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counselors, K-12 fine arts such as orchestra, music, chorus, and band, K-12 physical education, Career and Technical Education (CTE), our highly recognized NJROTC program, smaller class sizes, safety monitors, and middle and high school athletics. Similarly, the DAA override provides needed equipment and capital outlay needs such as fine arts instruments, athletic equipment, purchase of climate controlled school buses, instructional technology, and classroom furniture and equipment. These are not new taxes. Furthermore, even with the current levy for these items, residents in SUSD can expect their overall school tax rates to decrease this year.

Bus Transportation

Finally, I would like to thank you for your sacrifice and patience regarding one of our biggest challenges thus far this year. Due to ongoing staff shortages in transportation services, we are having to initiate temporary, rolling bus suspensions, basically canceling a handful of routes each week, on a rotating basis. This is anticipated to continue through the Fall Break. More specific details about this operational adaptation are being communicated this week. Currently, we have eleven (11) open routes, with eight (8) being covered with flexible drivers. Furthermore, this year we are transporting 3443 riders each day, in contrast with 2966 last year. These are not unlike the challenges being faced in different public and private sectors, including air travel, health care, hospitality, and retail sales. Although it pains me to do this, I have approved the temporary action step for the following reasons. First, it allows us to manage expectations, and operate quality and more predictable routes, given human resource limitations. Second, it allows us to communicate proactively with parents so that alternate transportation arrangements can be made for the assigned week without bus service. Finally, it allows everyone to temporarily share in this sacrifice by taking a week without bus service, so that no routes are canceled indefinitely. We have hired a couple of new drivers and will continue to pursue, evaluate, and do whatever is necessary and reasonably possible to replenish our bus driver corps, so that we can regain fully normal operations as soon as possible. I apologize for this inconvenience, and thank you for your patience.

In summary, despite the challenges, we are blessed and have so much to be thankful for, as the new year gets underway. I am looking forward to a wonderful year of much success and many wonderful activities in support of our students. I will see you around campus. And, together, we will continue to make a difference!

Sincerely,

Manuel O. Valenzuela, Ed.D.
Superintendent

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