



January 14, 2022

Dear SUSD Families,

Like the nation, state and county, our community continues to be hit hard by COVID, more so, in fact, than at any other time since the virus started appearing nearly two years ago. Driven by the highly contagious omicron variant, the evidence suggests that a majority of us are being exposed to the virus almost everywhere we go.

This morning, we deployed a new [daily dashboard](#) to provide the SUSD community with an up-to-date snapshot of student and district staff-reported positive cases as they come in to us. What we have found is that our district epidemic curve mirrors that of the [county](#) and that our case count is certainly not unique.

Still, we remain focused on keeping our schools open for in-person learning. We continue to require staff to be masked and strongly recommend students wear masks while indoors. While we continue with contact tracing, it is not happening as expeditiously as we would like. High demand for COVID-19 tests is resulting in significant delays in receiving results. Consequently, by the time we learn of a confirmed case, the close contact notification process is often ineffective. That is why we have decided to concentrate the majority of our contact tracing efforts on our medically fragile and most vulnerable students.

As parents, you are our partners. With the elevated number of cases in the community, we need your help more than ever in monitoring your students for symptoms and keeping them home when they are sick, even if you don't believe they have COVID. To help us protect our in-person learning capabilities, we also ask that you please keep your student at home while you are waiting for the result of a COVID test. Not doing so potentially exposes your student's classmates and teachers, possibly creating even more infections.

Consistent with CDC, AzDHS and MCDPH, we continue to recommend universal mask wearing and COVID vaccinations for age-eligible students (5-18).

- Getting vaccinated is the best protection against serious illness related to a COVID infection. The MCDPH [website](#) provides helpful information and there are many [convenient testing](#) sites within our own SUSD community.
- Universal masking (regardless of vaccination status) is recommended while indoors when community transmission is at high or substantial levels, as ours is.
- Staff and students who are symptomatic or have a pending COVID test result should remain at home.
- SUSD nurses will continue to follow the protocol of sending home symptomatic students. Students will be allowed to return when they produce a negative COVID test and their symptoms have improved.

Please note that in accordance with [federal regulations](#), masks continue to be required on all SUSD school buses.

We continually review our multi-layered mitigation efforts and are prepared to pivot as needed, not only as a district, but campus to campus. At some point, this may include implementing a [test-to-stay](#) protocol or requiring masks for a two-week period for an entire school. Only ADA exemptions would be honored at that time. Mask exemptions granted last semester are no longer in effect.

We are aware of an increased interest in Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and air filtration systems for our classrooms. MERV-13 air filters are already installed in district cooling and heating systems to reduce the potential for transmission. More MERV-13 filters are on the way, some of which will be used to construct what are called [Corsi-Rosenthal boxes](#). Other air filtering mitigation systems are being considered for large areas, such as cafeterias and gymnasiums.

Despite everyone's best efforts to keep them healthy and safe, we know that some students will be learning from home for a short time. It is so important that students remain connected to their classrooms, and it is the reason we created the [SUSD Learning From Home Support](#) system that provides students and parents with immediate and continuous access to learning resources while COVID attendance restrictions are being observed.

Health officials say that while this current spike of omicron cases is significant, the eventual drop-off will be, as well. Already, many parts of the world, including some major U.S. cities, are beginning to see the wave of cases recede or flatten. We appreciate your vigilance over the next couple weeks as we work together diligently to keep in-person learning happening and our students, who must be home, connected to their classes and teachers.

Governing Board Action

At its first meeting of the new year this week, the SUSD Governing Board elected its 2022 officers. Former Desert Canyon Middle School teacher Julie Cieniawski was elected president; community college instructor Dr. Libby Hart-Wells was elected vice president. We look forward to working with this new Board leadership team.

Also at its January 11 meeting, the Board approved a plan to restructure the Coronado Learning Community (CLC), creating a strong preschool through high school trajectory to ensure the CLC's future and once again give the community its own middle school, at Tonalea. CLC families, school staff and community members played a key role in the restructuring plan's review and adoption. The plan also calls for Yavapai Elementary School to welcome students back to campus next school year. Read more about the CLC restructuring plan [here](#).

SUSD in the Community

For 22 years, Scottsdale Unified School District has hosted the ***MLK Youth Voices*** event at Saguaro High School, in conjunction with the city of Scottsdale's Community Celebrating Diversity (CCD) annual "Living the Dream" dinner. Last year, as a result of the pandemic, the Voices event was conducted virtually, but a positive by-product of that was that many more Valley high schools participated in the Voices event, since no travel was involved.

Based on that success, this year's event, held yesterday, was a hybrid event, with Saguaro students in the auditorium (with social distancing and masks) and 13 other high schools participating remotely. Speeches by Saguaro sophomore Amutha Rajasundaram, junior Baraa Abdelghne and senior Ivan Martin were particularly moving, with each eloquently describing challenges they have already faced in their young lives. Keynote speaker Patricia Russell-McCloud was inspiring and performances by the Saguaro Symphonic Orchestra, the Voices of

Saguaro choir and the Saguaro Movement Collective dance team combined to make for another wonderful event. Congratulations to the SUSD/CCD event committee, Saguaro and Principal Ann Achtziger. Watch the event [here](#).

Pay It Forward

The expression “it takes a village ...” is no doubt one you have heard before. It is an accurate description of our strong SUSD organization, and we were reminded of that once again this week with the recognition of one of our enrollment support coordinators, Tammy Slont, by her student records colleague, Denise Reimann, on the *Arizona’s Family* feature, “Pay It Forward.” These types of strong, professional relationships exude who we are as a district. Watch yesterday’s broadcast [here](#).

Lastly, as we head into the holiday weekend during which we celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we take this opportunity to reflect on his work and on how it may illuminate a path forward during these contentious times. Dr. King’s commitment to non-violence in the face of adversity represents a difficult road, but one that resulted in meaningful change that to this day is impactful. He painted a picture of the “beloved community,” where every person, regardless of race, class, or creed, was respected and valued, reminding us of the need to see the humanity in others every day.

Have a wonderful and safe weekend,

Scottsdale Unified School District [Cabinet](#) and [Leadership Team](#)