



January 21, 2022

Dear SUSD Families,

As we alerted you to earlier this week, the latest spike in COVID cases in our community and the impact that it is having on our students and staff continues to present us with challenges. As expected, case counts and the positivity rate in our zip codes remains at a [high level](#). Our new [COVID-19 Case Dashboard](#), which is updated daily, provides great insight into what we are seeing in our schools and reflects the elevated number of cases we are seeing among students and staff. If there is a silver lining to this cloud that has hung over us for so long, local health officials expect the number of cases to peak by the end of the month, followed by a rapid decline. Indeed, we are beginning to see a slight decline in cases on our campuses and are hopeful that trend continues.

We appreciate your continuing to be our partner in managing and mitigating this situation. For our part, we are continuing to find creative ways to cover classes, provide transportation on most bus routes and maintain every opportunity for in-person learning at our 28 school campuses. We are exceedingly proud of the ‘all hands on deck’ approach our staff at all levels has committed itself to. And we are grateful for the diligence and forethought shown by our teachers in preparing and leaving lesson plans for the times they must be away from their classrooms. These combined efforts have made difficult circumstances far more manageable. It is more important than ever that our students remain connected to their learning, especially if they must stay home temporarily due to COVID restrictions. The [SUSD Learning From Home Support](#) system provides students and parents with the immediate access they need to learning resources.

As the omicron surge continues, we are reminded of the importance of wearing a properly fitted mask and staying home if you are sick. We know that not all COVID tests are created equal, and according to the FDA, some at-home antigen tests are not sensitive to picking up the current variant. While we continue to strongly recommend that students wear masks indoors, please remember that those students whose symptoms are resolving and who return to school on the 6th day after testing positive must wear a mask for an additional 5 days. *This is not optional*. If a student appears to be experiencing symptoms of COVID or any other illness, expect a call from the school nurse that they need to be picked up or, if they drive, are being sent home.

For the Record

At the end of last week, we were notified that more than 300 Afghan refugees have recently relocated to Scottsdale, resulting in our mobilizing a district team to plan for providing educational services and supports to the school-aged children. Under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, SUSD has an obligation to provide educational services to homeless students who reside within the district.

On August 19, 2021, Governor Ducey and Speaker of the House Rusty Bowers issued a [statement](#) regarding the welcoming of Afghan refugees to Arizona. In the statement, they noted: “The Arizona Office of Refugee Resettlement housed at the Arizona Department of Economic Security will work with them [the refugees] to secure housing and employment, enroll in English classes if needed, connect them with health care resources, and their children—including their

daughters who would be denied an education under the Taliban—will be enrolled in school. They helped our military members in their country, and now we stand ready to help them in ours.”

Some in our community are questioning whether SUSD should be serving these refugee children. In addition to the fact that we are required by federal law to do so, it is important to reiterate two of our core values: *Empathy* — we welcome all with kindness, love, compassion, and joy; and *Inclusion* — we create an equitable environment where everyone is respected, is treated with dignity, and has a sense of belonging.

While we did not anticipate this influx of new students, we are committed to marshalling the resources and supports necessary to ensure that these children are welcomed into our schools as they transition to their new lives in this country. We would also like to thank those parents in our community who have already stepped up to offer help to these families and to our staff who stand at the ready to support our new students.

Academics

We are pleased to announce that a principal has been named for Yavapai Elementary School, set to reopen next school year as a result of the recently announced restructuring of the Coronado Learning Community. It’s a familiar face, too: current Tonalea K-8 Principal Dr. David Priniski, who, in a way, will be going home, having served as Yavapai’s assistant principal several years ago. While at Tonalea, Dr. Priniski has established a strong culture of learning and high academic expectations that we know he will take to Yavapai to set up Thunderbird students for success.

Fine Arts

Our student musicians continue to distinguish themselves, not only within the district, but in Arizona. Three Cherokee students and five Sequoia students have been named to the All-State Elementary Orchestra, four Cocopah Middle School are seated in the All-State Middle School Orchestra, and Arcadia and Saguaro High schools have a musician each playing for the All-State High School Jazz Band. These students’ dedication to musical expression is most commendable.

District Spelling Bee

Next Friday, January 28, the 24 winners – ranging from 3rd graders to 8th graders – of school Bees conducted last month will gather at Saguaro High School for the annual SUSD Spelling Bee. The winner and five alternates will represent the district in February at the Regional Bee, with a place in the March Arizona Spelling Bee up for grabs and, ultimately, the National Spelling Bee in Washington, D.C. this summer. C-o-n-g-r-a-t-u-l-a-t-i-o-n-s, spellers, and good luck!

In closing, remember that next Wednesday, January 26, is an Early Release Day for all grades.

Thank you,

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