



January 8, 2021

Hello, Scottsdale Unified Families,

The new year continues to bring us challenges that none of us could have predicted last year at this time. In these ongoing difficult times, we continue to do our very best to provide reasonable and practical solutions that strike a balance with the needs of your families and students and our staff.

COVID Update from Supt. Menzel

The [benchmark metrics](#) for SUSD's 15 zip codes continue to reflect substantial community spread of COVID. I have heard many questions regarding why the District has not returned to all virtual learning when the benchmark metrics are all red. I think it is important to share the position of Maricopa County Department of Public Health with you, since it is their updated guidance in mid-December that the Governing Board used to establish our phased-in, return-to-learn plan for the second semester:

Statement Regarding MCDPH Support for In-person learning at Schools

In October 2020, the Arizona Department of Health Services published recommendations for schools "Safely Returning to In-person Instruction¹" to guide schools in monitoring community level spread and maintaining a safe learning environment. Based on this guidance, ADHS states "If a county has all three benchmarks in the red category, ADHS recommends schools transition to virtual learning in consultation with their local health department." This statement is a general recommendation. In discussions with ADHS, MCDPH and ADHS have agreed to support those jurisdictions who are able to maintain a safe learning environment with regular school-by-school monitoring, regardless of levels of community COVID-19 transmission. If a school/district does not have enough staffing to maintain a safe environment, or if a school/district experiences a school-related outbreak that cannot be controlled with public health mitigation strategies, MCDPH would support transitioning to a virtual learning environment.

Further, with the recent publications emphasizing the benefits of in-person learning, particularly for elementary schools, and the emerging data indicating that in-person school attendance is not a risk factor for youth testing positive for COVID 19, MCDPH recommends preferentially keeping elementary and middle schools open for in-person learning. If a phased approach is desired, MCDPH recommends beginning with elementary and middle schools prior to opening high schools to in-person learning.

¹ <https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/infectious-disease-epidemiology/novel-coronavirus/covid-19-safely-return-to-in-person-instruction.pdf>

² <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2772834>

³ https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6950e3.htm?s_cid=mm6950e3_w



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Supt. Menzel Update (continued)

New Governing Board and Modified Phased-In Return

Our new Governing Board met twice this week, on Tuesday electing its 2021 officers. Jann-Michael Greenburg will serve as Board president this year; Julie Cieniawski was elected vice president.

The Board met again last evening and voted to delay the return of middle school students to in-person learning from January 11 to January 19, the same day high school students are scheduled to return.

Here is the schedule for the week of January 11, 2021:

- Elementary Schools: Full day of in-person learning
- K-8s: Cheyenne, Copper Ridge and Echo Canyon – Full day of in-person learning
Tonalea: Grades K - 5 – Full day of in-person learning
Grades 6 - 8 – Virtual learning, on same schedule as Quarter 2
- Middle Schools: Virtual learning, on same schedule as Quarter 2
- High Schools: Virtual learning, on same schedule as Quarter 2

The Board discussed at length current COVID-19 conditions in the community and state, the Maricopa County Department of Public Health guidance, and the number of [positive COVID cases reported to schools this week](#) upon our return from winter break. The Board directed me to work with a cross-sector of stakeholders, including SUSD association representatives, to develop a recommendation for its consideration at its January 19 meeting related to thresholds for when a building would return to virtual learning. Several local districts have already established such measures with specific guidelines for notification timelines, duration and process for returning to in-person learning. At this time, the plan is to continue with our school-by-school approach to decisions regarding when to return students to virtual learning. As a reminder, all of our Governing Board meetings are available online on our [YouTube channel](#), where you can watch the meetings live or review them when you have time. Thank you.

Teacher and School District Employee Vaccinations

We are pleased to report that SUSD and the Paradise Valley Unified School District have developed a partnership with HonorHealth to offer COVID-19 vaccinations to educators and educational support staff in a three-day, drive-thru clinic January 22 – 24. We anticipate that this significant, additional mitigation effort will reap substantial dividends for students, teaching staff and schools, and our desire to be able to continue to offer safe, in-person instruction on our campuses.

January 13 Professional Development Day

We want to take this opportunity to remind you that students will be released early next Wednesday, January 13, so that a previously scheduled SUSD staff professional development (PD) can occur that afternoon. Please note that unlike our other Wednesday early release days, elementary school Safe Places to Learn and middle school/high school Learning Labs **do not operate** on PD days. Kids Club and City of Scottsdale programs do, however, and begin upon dismissal on PD days. Three other professional development days are scheduled this semester – Feb. 10, March 24 and May 12 – so please mark your calendars.

Athletics Update

High Schools – Today, the Arizona Interscholastic Association, after consultation with its Sports Medicine Advisory Committee, voted 5-4 that Arizona will **not** continue with winter sports - basketball, soccer, wrestling and Spiritline - due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was a very

challenging decision that was reached after several hours of discussion. This news has been communicated to coaches and athletes at our five sites. We are saddened for our athletes, coaches, staff, schools and community, and continue to appreciate your understanding and flexibility under these very difficult conditions. Should you have any questions, please contact the school coach or athletic director.

Middle Schools – At this time, SUSD has decided to cancel third quarter middle school sports - girls basketball, boys flag football, cross country and Spiritline - due to current COVID-19 metrics in our community and our desire to return to and remain in in-person learning as safely as possible. We recognize that this may be disappointing for many, but we appreciate your understanding while we navigate the continuous complexities of the pandemic. If you have specific questions about athletics, please contact your school athletic director.

Time to think about Kindergarten in August!

Our elementary and K-8 schools will offer virtual information sessions next week about their kindergarten learning programs. To see the schedule, please go to www.susd.org/Kindergarten. Enrollment for the 2021 - 2022 school year begins a week from today, on January 15.

Nutrition Services

Our free, weekly Wednesday curbside meal distribution service resumed this week at Oak Learning Academy, 7501 E. Oak St., Scottsdale. We also added a site at Chaparral High School, 6935 E. Gold Dust Ave., Scottsdale, this week and next. Between 7 – 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday at both locations, we provide “7-Day Meal Bundles” that include 7 days’ worth of breakfasts, lunches, snacks and suppers. Meals are free to any child in the community. No qualification is necessary. See www.susd.org/Meals for complete details.

ALL children under the age of 18 are eligible to receive FREE meals from SUSD Nutrition Services through the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year, thanks to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). SUSD in-person learners can choose their free breakfast and lunch daily at their school. Middle school and high school students will have an opportunity to take a free ‘grab-and-go’ lunch each day as they depart campus when they return to in-person instruction on January 19.

Questions, Comments or Need Assistance? Let’s Talk!

We always like hearing directly from you and believe you like hearing directly from the person at SUSD who is best equipped to provide you with the right information. That’s what our Let’s Talk website app is for! Submit your questions, comments and suggestions at www.susd.org/LetsTalk.

We remain deeply appreciative of the many ways in which you support our school district. We could not do this without you!

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