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Dear SUSD Families,

I am writing to provide an important update as we continue to work with public health officials to address the increasing number of COVID cases in our region. On Friday we shared information indicating that three of our Scottsdale Unified School District zip codes had crossed the 100/100,000 cases benchmark for the first time since we returned to in-person instruction. In that message we noted language from the Maricopa County Department of Public Health guidance to “begin planning a transition...to Virtual with onsite support the first week that the data changes.”

Subsequent to sharing that guidance, we learned that the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) updated their [recommendations for schools](#) (slide 6 in the linked document contains the specific language). Significantly, the recommendation to return to virtual learning is predicated on all three benchmarks reaching red status whereas previously it was only one indicator becoming red for two consecutive weeks.

After learning about this change, I was able to talk with officials at Maricopa County Department of Public Health regarding implications for our schools. I specifically asked whether the recommendation to close schools was automatic after one or more benchmark indicators were red for two consecutive weeks. While MCDPH officials are still processing the revised guidance from ADHS, they indicated that the decision to close schools *is not automatic*. They recognize the importance of being able to provide in-person instruction and that local context matters. While the level of community spread is an important indicator, it is not the only variable considered before recommending a return to virtual instruction with onsite support. The other factors include the number of cases in the school, evidence of transmission within the school, availability of the teaching workforce, and compliance with public health recommended mitigation strategies. The decision to close is not taken lightly or made quickly, but will be done considering all of these factors on a school by school basis.

I specifically asked about elementary schools and was told they would not be recommending closing any of them at this time. While things can change, I thought it was important to provide this update to all of our staff and families since there have been so many emails and Let’s Talk dialogues following the Friday communication.

We want nothing more than to be able to keep our schools open. I am grateful for the efforts of so many in our community to follow the public health guidance regarding wearing masks when in public, maintaining physical distance, washing hands, and remaining home when sick. We cannot let down our guard at this critical juncture. Together we can navigate these challenges in order to meet the needs of our students.

Sincerely,

Scott A. Menzel