



SAHUARITA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

April 8, 2021

Dear Sahuarita Family:

As I write these words, we are in the first week of full-time, five day, in-person learning for all schools in grades K-12. The last time that happened was over a year ago. It is truly heartwarming to walk around school campuses and witness operations relatively close to what they were in the pre-pandemic era.

We remain committed and tirelessly focused upon doing everything we can to keep our schools operating effectively and safely. We have learned that a critical element to achieving this outcome is the strong implementation of multifaceted and concurrent mitigation steps. This has included meticulous and frequent cleaning and sanitation protocol, wearing masks with fidelity, distancing norms, personal hygiene, use of PPE, and implementing recommended procedures and practices. The development and rollout of the vaccine has provided an additional layer of defense and contributed to the decline in cases over time.

It is important to keep in mind that the situation still contains much uncertainty, and it is not over. We must keep a relentless focus on doing whatever we can to keep our schools safe. We have all heard of the different variants that have emerged, and the vaccination rates, although encouraging, still have a ways to go before achieving the advised population majority that foreseeably can create a large-scale level of protection for society as a whole. Furthermore, we have emerging evidence that many people, including young people, have contracted COVID-19, and yet exhibit little or even no symptoms. In our athletic program testing partnership with United Community Health Center (UHC), that was often our observation. However, asymptomatic carriers can still spread the disease, including to people who may have more vulnerability for illness.

Together, we must remain vigilant and focused to keep our students, staff, and community healthy and our schools open for full time in-person learning for the long haul. As a further layer of protection, the Sahuarita USD #30 has been afforded a truly transformational opportunity to be part of developing a National model for schools. Through direct collaboration with the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Washington, DC, we will be one of only five public school districts in the United States of America to launch the Increasing Community Access to Testing (ICATT) program this spring. **Basically, we will be piloting a program to provide, at no cost, a weekly voluntary PCR COVID-19 test to every SUSD student, K-12, at each school site.** Additionally, this free, weekly voluntary PCR testing will be offered to all staff members.

The goal is clear, to keep schools open and safe by creating an enhanced safety net through frequent testing. This will help make sure that any positive cases are caught early and regularly, thus preventing the spread of the virus and keeping our students healthy and in school. It is hoped that this new layer of our comprehensive mitigation plan will give families peace of mind in regards to health and safety, while also striving to preserve the ideal educational learning environment.

Office of the Superintendent

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The process is simple. Each school will have an assigned day each week. Students will be assigned a time to get a simple nose swab for the PCR test. It will be organized by our staff and should cause minimal deviation in the regular school week. The sample is taken from just inside the nostrils and takes just a couple of seconds to collect. It will all be done at school during the school day. The tests will be managed and organized by eTrueNorth, one of the Nation's largest providers of COVID-19 testing. Results will be provided to the District in 24-48 hours. Any individuals with positive tests will be contacted by our team, as always, along with corresponding tracking and tracing steps.

The CDC and Sahuarita USD have requirements in regards to privacy, and those will be followed with fidelity. **The testing program for students is voluntary, and parent consent is required.** Testing will continue to be required for participation in high school extracurricular athletic activities, as it has largely been all year. However, it is my hope that all of our SUSD families will take advantage of the opportunity to be on the leading edge of this National investment in helping our schools to be as safe as they can possibly be, and to remain open, full time, without further disruption. The CDC hopes that the process will inform their program development efforts and serve as a model for best practices across our entire Country.

The target date for the commencement of this exciting program is April 19, 2021. More detailed information about procedures and routines is forthcoming. We are honored to be among America's first schools to launch this initiative. Together, we can make a difference, and we must do everything we can to keep our schools safe and open for good. Thank you for your consideration and support!

Sincerely,

Manuel O. Valenzuela, Ed.D.
Superintendent

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