



## OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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SUPERINTENDENT  
Todd A. Jaeger, J.D.

November 17, 2020

Dear Amphitheater Staff and Community:

While COVID-19 cases are on the rise in our broader community, across the state, and across the nation, cases within schools are relatively few – but that could change. I am therefore writing you to share some relevant information about the cases which have been reported in our District and in schools generally so that you have that perspective, and I am asking for your help.

### Where COVID Cases in Schools Are Originating

The Pima County Health Department (PCHD) has informed me that, as of last Friday (November 13), there were 150 reported cases of COVID-19 in schools throughout all of Pima County. Notably, only 5% of those cases actually originated at school, and a significant amount of that 5% occurred in faculty breakrooms, between and among adults only. Thus, COVID spread at schools is currently very low, with 95% of cases originating *outside of the school setting* – typically through private social events and public activities. Some of these activities include:

- parties and other social gatherings;
- athletic events;
- sleepovers; and
- carpooling.

Based upon this data, among other things, PCHD is presently recommending the continuation of hybrid learning in our schools for the immediate future.

### Mitigation Efforts Are Working

When cases of COVID have been reported in our schools, PCHD, our schools, our affected families, and the District's internal Health Services Department, have worked together to quickly identify potential exposures and implement isolation or quarantine protocols. In some circumstances, this has resulted in significant numbers of students and staff needing to quarantine because social distancing and/or mask compliance could not be fully confirmed for those at risk of exposure. Almost all of those quarantined ultimately returned to school/work without becoming positive for the disease. And, when we have been able to confirm that social distancing and masking was practiced with fidelity so that students and staff did not have to quarantine, spread still has not occurred. *Mitigation efforts are working.*

Amphitheater High School • Canyon del Oro High School • Ironwood Ridge High School  
Amphitheater Middle School • Coronado K-8 School • Cross Middle School • La Cima Middle School • Wilson K-8 School  
Copper Creek Elementary • Donaldson Elementary • Harelson Elementary • Holaway Elementary • Innovation Academy • Keeling Elementary  
Mesa Verde Elementary • Nash Elementary • Painted Sky Elementary • Prince Elementary • Rio Vista Elementary • Walker Elementary • Rillito Center

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### ***Keeping Schools Open Requires All of Us to Work Together***

Notwithstanding the positive information provided above, the frank reality is that with community-wide spread trending upward, schools could still be forced to implement additional protocols and restrictions in response. This could mean the cancellation of extracurricular activities, including band and athletics, further limitations for access to events and -- in a worst-case scenario -- forcing a return to full-time remote learning.

Schools play a vital role in our communities, and we have seen that having the in-person option this school year has provided a significant benefit for the academic, social, emotional, and physical wellbeing of our students and families. The isolation resulting from full remote learning has taken a toll on our children. Public and mental health officials now urge more and more against further school closures. Having schools open and operational also allows parents and caregivers to keep attending work, thereby helping to support our local economy.

But, our ability to maintain in-person instruction and support our local economy is in danger as the community-based spread of COVID-19 continues to grow.

A week ago, state education and public health officials gathered together for a press conference to discuss the importance of basic mitigation efforts and to emphasize that school can only continue to operate in hybrid mode if people observe the masking and distancing protocols not just at school but throughout our community. We all know by now what those protocols are:

- Maintain six feet of distance from others to every extent possible.
- Wear a mask in any gathering with other people – whether at school or elsewhere. Masks have been shown to slow disease spread by about 70% (Sources: Howard, J., Huang, A, et al. 2020; Wang, Y., Tian, H., et al. 2020; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Davies, A., Thompson, K. et al. 2013).
- Wash your hands frequently and use hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Stay home when you are sick; keep your loved ones home when they are sick.

### **Lessons Learned**

Several weeks ago, I was receiving a barrage of letters, emails and phone calls from students, staff, parents and community members asking that our District “open” fall athletics. Not long after we did begin fall sports, however, a group of parents and students attended an off-campus, non-school social event at which there was not adherence to either appropriate social distancing or mask protocols. As a consequence, several students became positive for COVID and dozens more were quarantined – ultimately having a negative impact on the programs that so many had wanted restored for our students.

We must learn from situations like this one and others, where simple breakdowns on our mitigation protocols jeopardize our common purpose of meeting the needs of our students and community.

I urge all of our students, families and staff to be absolutely vigilant in doing their part to help us continue to educate children in a safe and healthy environment. Let's all remember to protect ourselves and protect others as we continue to do our best to manage through this pandemic and get to the other side.

And, as we prepare to express our thanks for all those in our lives and for all of our blessings, let us take particular care to do everything we can as a community to ensure that, some weeks from now, we can look back with gratitude to realize our actions made all the difference in protecting us all and, most importantly, our children.

Yours most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Todd A. Jaeger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "T".

Todd A. Jaeger, J.D.  
Superintendent