

December 30, 2020

Dear GUSD Community,

I hope a Merry Christmas was had by all and I want to wish the very best Happy New Year for all of you. I am writing to update the GUSD "Path Forward" as we approach Monday, January 4, 2021. The decisions about how to best ensure the safety of our students and staff at GUSD while still doing the best we can to educate them have been very difficult for me and the school board.

Considering the impact on safety and education of providing in-person options versus only operating in a virtual environment has indeed provoked many differing viewpoints. Some staff have advocated for virtual only options for our school district. Others have advocated for a 100% return to in-person. GUSD has not opted thus far for either of those options. Instead GUSD has remained steadfast in the "three-choice" mode. Families were allowed to choose to go totally online through our TKO (Tiger Knowledge Online) program, to send their student for two days per week, or send their students four days per week. At the beginning of the second trimester we allowed for more two day per week students but no more four day per week students. The district has held firm to this model through the recent Winter Break.

As we move back into school after winter break we do not have any plans to alter our educational delivery system. I realize that many schools have extended winter break due to the resurgence of COVID-19 incidents throughout the state. The Arizona Department of Health Services has indicated that their benchmarks lead them to recommend an all virtual approach for schools throughout the entire state of Arizona. Many school districts will follow that recommendation and many will not. We will continue to monitor the benchmarks at a state, county, and local level **but we will be in session in our "three choice" mode on January 4, 2021 for the following reasons:**

1. **Our GUSD Health and Safety Experience** – GUSD has not been immune from COVID-19 impact. We have had around 20 staff members test positive for COVID-19. We have had approximately the same number of students test positive. The district has followed the guidelines of the CDC and Gila Co. Health Department in quarantining. We have had to shut down several classrooms as a result. We have been watching positivity rates and spread within schools in Globe and on a statewide and national level and have noticed that the trend is that schools really are not the major spreader of COVID. While we do not want anyone to get sick we are assured that mitigation measures being taken are helping to protect staff and students.
2. **Our GUSD Educational Experience** – Our experience has been that while some students have managed to make educational progress online, we have been much more successful educational with those who are able to attend in one of our in-person modes. We are still learning about online education and getting better at it daily, but almost all educational authorities agree that in-person education works best for most students.
3. **Our GUSD Community Impact** – We have heard from many families and community members who indicate that having our school open for in-person allows for them to go to work and provide for their families. We support that as a school district. We also believe that students, staff and families need consistency and that we need to offer them a consistent school experience rather than continually changing delivery models.

So, as we proceed to reopen on January 4, 2021 please be assured that I will continue to monitor our situation right here in Globe. We will continue to quarantine as needed. We may be called upon to close a school building or the district if the spread continues. Please do your part to minimize spread by wearing your mask, washing hands and staying home when feeling any symptoms. As in many other places in the state we will continue to offer in-person education while doing our best to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

We are living in a polarized society and COVID-19 has proven to be a very polarizing situation. I realize that everyone has an opinion and that those opinions are valid to those holding them. I have anguished over the decisions I have been tasked to make. I do hold some hope for the near future however. The GUSD staff is being offered the opportunity to receive the COVID-19 vaccine on Friday, January 8, 2021. I realize that this will not be an immediate answer to all of the COVID-19 challenges, but it is a start.

Thank you all for your cooperation through these issues. The school board and I take these decisions seriously and try to balance all of the viewpoints while still trying to live up to our vision of "Capturing Hearts, Empowering Minds". We promise to continue to try to do just that!

Sincerely,



Jerry Jennex, Superintendent