

Peach Springs Unified School District

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William Santiago, Superintendent
Dr. Terry Maurer, Executive Director
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April 24, 2023

Dear Parents, Staff, and Community Members,

We are reaching out to you to share an update on your school district. We want to begin by expressing our gratitude and thanking Peach Springs and the surrounding communities for your support and involvement. We cannot have an effective school district without you.

Our vision is for schools to be hubs for our children, their families, and the community. We have spent the past three years working to rebuild relationships and school buildings, improve our educational services for students, and restore trust. That work is not complete, but we want to acknowledge the parents, volunteers, community partners, and the Hualapai Tribe for helping to reopen Music Mountain High School. We are excited to help bring our high school students home.

News from Peach Springs Schools

It has been an exciting year for both Peach Springs Elementary and Music Mountain High School. For the first time in the historical tracking of letter grades by the Arizona Department of Education in schools, Peach Springs Elementary has gone from a failing grade of “F” to a letter grade of “D.” This is a very significant milestone for the district in our academic growth, representing a positive shift in momentum, and we certainly are celebrating this success. Specifically, our elementary students have been hard at work, 30% of our students demonstrated 100% growth in reading and math! In addition, Peach Springs Elementary School hosted three family and community nights that focused on STEAM, Literacy, and preparing for the state assessments.

Music Mountain Jr./Sr. High School is proud of our middle schoolers for their hard work with mandatory state testing this month. Just recently, they have persevered with confidence a three week testing schedule, have been compliant, giving their very best effort. Also, our 9th graders have had 100% attendance and completion of the ACT Aspire. We’ve graduated our first class of high schoolers from Music Mountain Online Academy and will be expanding on-campus class offerings. Next school year, for the first time in almost twenty years, Music Mountain High School will be offering an AIA athletics program. We hope that you will join our students and staff in cheering on the Warriors!

We will also continue to work to bring additional educational opportunities to our students and the community. The district is exploring opportunities to work with the Tribe, Mohave Community College, and universities to bring more educational and enrichment programs to the area. We hope to be sharing more on the potential for new programs in the near future.

Governing Board Opening

We need your help! The district currently has a posted opening on our Governing Board. The Governing Board includes volunteers from Peach Springs and across the District. The Board meets regularly (normally once a month) to discuss and make decisions that are essential for the education being provided to our students. Please submit a resume and a statement of interest sharing why you would make a good Board member no later than noon on April 28th. If you are interested in serving on the Governing Board, contact Lisa Norton at email: nortonl@psusd8.org or by phone at (928) 455-5003, Ext. 154.

Opportunities for Public Comment

Superintendent Santiago and the Governing Board want to hear from you. The Board meets monthly, and each regular Board meeting includes a call to the public. While the Board may not be able to discuss or vote on the topic you share if it is not on the agenda due to Open Meeting laws, hearing from community members allows the Board to hear your ideas, set agendas for future Board meetings, and help set the direction for the District.

Board meetings also provide you with the opportunity to hear updates and reports on academic programs, student events, and developments in the District.

Notices for each Board meeting are posted online at the District website (www.psusd8.org), and on the front doors of Peach Springs Elementary. Board meetings are normally held at Peach Springs Elementary.

Budget and Staffing Updates

Before the start of each school year, the Governing Board considers a budget to fund items like teacher and staff salaries, books, curriculum, technology, and building maintenance. Since 2000, public schools have received additional federal funding. Unfortunately, that additional funding is now coming to an end. Like other school districts, Peach Springs Unified faces difficult decisions on how to allocate the resources entrusted to it. The District's Governing Board and leadership take that responsibility very seriously.

The District's first priority is the children who live in Peach Springs and the surrounding communities. Accordingly, the District has prioritized spending in classrooms as much as possible. We will not attempt to save money at the expense of student learning by combining grades, or by removing teachers from classrooms. Each grade will continue to have a teacher certified in the subject area he or she teaches.

Reduced federal funding will require some budget cuts. Those cuts will start at the top. The District will be eliminating two administrative positions. Superintendent Santiago, who is also a certified high school principal, will also take on the responsibility as Principal at Music Mountain High School. The District has also cut spending for consultants and other services.

Sadly, this will also mean that some support staff will not be brought back. We greatly regret having to make this decision and would not be doing so if it were not absolutely necessary. We recognize that this will be difficult for each of the staff members.

Please know that we are doing everything we can to grow enrollment and attendance, which in turn will allow the District to fund additional positions. In the meantime, we do not want to promise a position that we cannot fund, as that would only force us to make job cuts without any advance notice.

The solution to this problem is growth. Fortunately, our student population continues to grow. More students mean more funding available for our students. With that, we hope to restore some of the positions lost. The District has also worked hard to identify and apply for any additional sources of funding, including grants.

Many other school districts are facing similar, difficult choices. By careful budgeting, and prioritizing spending on students in the classroom, we hope to increase enrollment and bring in additional resources to help restore cuts.

District Policy on Indian Preference in Employment

The District has adopted policies on Equal Opportunity Employment, and on Indian Preference in Employment. The District's Indian Preference in Employment provides that, where the District has qualified Native American and non-native applicants with the same qualifications for a position, the District will give preference to the enrolled tribal member.

A copy of each policy available online at:

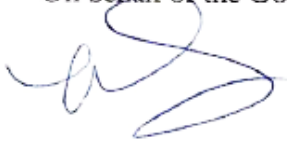
<https://policy.azsba.org/asba/browse/allmanuals/peachsprings/GBA>

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Promotion and Graduation

We are happy to announce that on Monday, May 22, 2023 we will be having our 8th grade promotion and high school graduation ceremonies at Music Mountain High School in the gym. Last school year, we proudly had five students walk across the stage to receive their diploma. Presently, we have six graduates that will be receiving their diploma and anticipate having up to a total of nine students graduate May 22nd. Please mark your calendar and plan to come support these amazing students on this important night.

On behalf of the Governing Board and administration, thank you.



Michelle Zephier
Governing Board President



William Santiago
District Superintendent