

Casa Grande Union High School District

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CGUHSD Parents and Guardians,

I need to inform you of an important update from the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) as we continue to work with public health officials to address the increasing number of COVID-19 cases in our county. Yesterday afternoon, ADHS made public a change to the benchmarks that school districts use to determine when students can be back on campus in a hybrid model for learning. In the original documentation that was created, school districts had to meet three different benchmarks and be either yellow or green in all three to have in-person learning. Also, in the original guidelines, there were two considerations for benchmark one, the number of cases less than 100/100K and two consecutive weeks of decline in cases. Benchmark two and benchmark three required not more than 7% positivity and 7% hospitalizations in Pinal County to open in a hybrid model. It was also suggested that should a school district not meet one of their benchmarks (become red), they move back to a virtual learning environment.

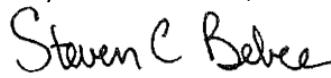
The new update reflects a change in the benchmarks from the original guidelines. Our new guidance from ADHS for benchmark one is based only on the number of cases being not more than 100/100K and benchmark two and three are now up to not more than 10% positivity and 10% hospitalizations in order to remain open in a hybrid or in-person learning model. Furthermore, the recommendation to move a school back to a virtual learning environment has moved from not meeting one benchmark (red) to not meeting all three benchmarks before they are required to move back to virtual learning.

After learning about this change, I was able to talk with officials at the Pinal County Department of Public Health regarding implications for our schools. While Pinal County Health 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.

As a school district, **we want nothing more than to be able to keep our schools open for those students who have chosen to learn in person.** We very much appreciate 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 at home when sick. We must remain diligent in our efforts at this critical juncture in our state and in our community.

We are confident that together, we can navigate these challenges safely to meet the needs of our students and keep our schools open. As a district, we will continue to report to the Pinal County Health Department and to follow their guidance as cases arise.

Stay well and be safe,


Steve Bebee
Superintendent

