



Home of the Roughriders
Pima Unified School District No. 6
192 E 200 S - P.O. Box 429
Pima, Arizona 85543

August 11, 2020

Dear Pima Parents and Guardians:

Pending approval by the Governing Board at the August meeting on Thursday, August 13, 6:00pm in the Digger O'Dell Community Activity Center, Pima Schools will resume in person classes on Monday, August 17, 2020.

We appreciate your support of our efforts to start the year off as well as possible. The governor has restricted the school's ability to open up until August 17, and we have been hard at work determining the best course of action moving forward. In an effort to support decision making by local leaders the Arizona Department of Health Services provided benchmarks for schools to use in assessing the appropriateness of returning to in-person instruction. These guidelines were provided to schools last Thursday. Over the weekend I had the opportunity to review the available data for both Graham County and the Pima School District relative to these guidelines.

Included in the guidelines was a request for local school leaders to meet with their respective county health officials prior to making decisions. I was able to do this yesterday. We discussed the three metrics and how they apply to Pima. The first metric looks at the number of cases. Throughout the pandemic Pima has seen a lower than expected number of cases. This has persisted in spite of opening our town pool and the town's library. Second, the state has asked school leaders to look at the percentage of positivity. This is the number of positive cases as a portion of those tested. The problem is when you test only sick people, you'd expect most of them to test positive. Even with our 'targeted testing' strategy fewer than one out of every five tests yield positive results. Also, if we changed our testing strategy, we would see a different 'positivity' level. Neither of these facts makes me feel confident about making decisions based on 'positivity'. Third, the state wants us to look at Hospitalization levels. The data they provide does not include our regional hospital. When asked if our hospital is struggling to handle an increasing demand for services due to COVID-19, I was told it is not. So, the logic we'd applied to school closures this spring is no longer needed. The representatives from the County Health Department are extremely helpful and have been hard at work providing us with information and services our community should be very appreciative of, but they did not give me a reason to justify closing schools.

Among the concerns we need to address is our ability to attract and retain quality teachers. We value our teachers and their needs, so I have asked them to share their feelings about reopening schools. I can tell you that they have concerns about bringing students back onto campus for classes, and it will be a great deal of work for them to get everything set up to be ready for students to come on campus on Monday. But, they love the opportunity to work with your children. We will support their efforts to get things ready, but our teachers did not provide a reason to justify keeping schools closed.

Lastly, we conducted a parent survey this summer to assess how parents feel about sending their children back to school. More than 90% of parents indicated that with the mitigation efforts in place that were outlined in the district's plan, they want to send their children back to school. The requirements the governor put in place call for schools to provide on-site supports

for any child a parent wants to send to school, so if almost all parents want to send their children to school, we should provide them with on-site in person instruction.

Information about bus routes will be sent in the next few days. Meals will be provided for our Elementary School students in the classroom, and older students will be able to get meals in the cafeteria with appropriate social distancing. Students will be required to wear masks while in buildings, and those with valid reasons for not should contact the principal to put a plan in place. Those students who need to remain at home will have the opportunity to continue the remote learning program. If this is what you need for your child, please contact your school.

This is not a decision I have made lightly. From day one my top priority and my first concern has been to balance the need to provide a quality education for every child with the need to do so in a safe environment. At this time that means returning to on campus school.

Our ability to keep our schools open will depend on your support. Students need to practice all the basics: handwashing, social distancing and staying home when sick, so we can continue to hold in person classes. We will carefully monitor data from the County Health Department indicating the number of cases in Pima. If we see a marked increase in the number of cases affecting school age children or adults in our community, we may return to distance learning. You will receive regular updates letting you know where those numbers are trending.

This decision will be submitted to the Pima School Board for approval at the meeting on Thursday, August 13, 2020. If you have questions or concerns please feel free to contact me at 387-8002 or you may come to the meeting to share your concerns with the board at the call to the public.

To summarize, Pima Schools will resume in person on-campus instruction for all students on Monday, August 17 pending board approval.

Stay Safe,

Mr. Sean E. Rickert
Superintendent