



GOVERNING BOARD AGENDA ITEM AMPHITHEATER UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 10

DATE OF MEETING: September 15, 2020

TITLE: Review and Approval of Plan for Reopening Schools for In-Person Instruction
(REVISED 9-14-2020)

BACKGROUND:

Since this Governing Board Agenda Item was first issued last week, the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to demonstrate its fluidity and constantly changing landscape. This item, and the recommendations it contains, have therefore been revised in light of the most recent information received from the Pima County Health Department, as well as the feedback received from the community regarding the original reopening proposal. The changes made are contained in italicized paragraphs (like this one).

Following Arizona Governor Ducey's statewide closure of schools for the remainder of SY 2019-2020, the Governing Board approved a plan on July 14, 2020, to reopen schools in Amphitheater Unified School District to in-person instruction for SY 2020-2021. The plan approved by the Governing Board provided families with an opportunity to choose between two (2) learning modalities for student instruction during SY 2020-2021: In-School Learning with Health Precautions (Alternative 1); or Full-Time Online Learning by Request (Alternative 2).

Information about the Alternatives

Alternative 1: (In-School Learning with Health Precautions) provides families who want their students to return to traditional school at a brick and mortar building an opportunity for them to do so once both the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) and the Pima County Health Department (PCHD) provide guidance that it is safe to do so. Until then, the students who elected this alternative will learn remotely by necessity and will be instructed by their assigned classroom teachers. Ultimately, these students will continue with those same teacher(s) once there is a return to in-person instruction and learning in school buildings.

Alternative 2: (Full-Time Online Learning by Request) provides families who want their students to remain online throughout SY 2020-2021 to do so through the District's standalone online K-12 school, Amphitheater Academy Online. Students who attend this school will learn online through a variety of virtual teaching platforms, as well as additional instructional support and assistance provided by a District teacher who is assigned to the student. The school assignment for these students remains in place regardless of public health determinations that in-person learning may resume.

The Reason that Schools Started with Remote Instruction by Necessity

While the ultimate goal for students who selected the first alternative was for them to begin learning in their school buildings, the changing course of the COVID-19 pandemic with infection rates surging regionally required the District to alter its plans for school year 2020-2021. At the July 14, 2020 Board meeting, the Superintendent explained that decisions on school opening and closures should follow the public guidance of the state and local health departments for re-opening schools for in-person learning. In addition, the



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Superintendent proposed that families and staff be given a two-week notice before school buildings reopen. Since the PCHD indicators on July 14, 2020 were all in the “Criteria Not Met” (red) zone, it was reported that school would likely not be able to return to in-person learning until at least after Labor Day.

The next week, on July 23, 2020, Arizona Governor Ducey confirmed Superintendent Jaeger’s assessment when he issued Executive Order 2020-51, which states in pertinent part as follows:

The Arizona Department of Health Services shall develop public health benchmarks for the safe return of in-person, teacher-led classroom instruction, and make them available no later than August 7, 2020. These recommendations shall be informed by the Centers for Disease Control Prevention guidance, and may be revised as necessary to reflect the most current public health standards.

- a. Each school district and charter school shall consider these recommendations, guidance from county health officials, community needs and available resources to determine when in-person, teacher-led classroom instruction can safely be made available.
- b. School districts and charter schools shall refer to mitigation strategies as outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to adopt a mitigation plan prior to opening a school building for on-site support services or in-person instruction.

Since then, the Superintendent has regularly met with PCHD to review health indicators to determine when schools can open to students for In-School Learning.

Can Pima County Schools Start In-Person Yet?

On September 2, 2020, the ADHS reported COVID-19 conditions in several counties across the state, including Pima County, would allow implementation of a “hybrid” model of instruction, potentially permitting some students to return to schools for in-person, teacher-led instruction in cohorts (partial groups of students at a time). The “hybrid” model thus authorized by ADHS does *not* allow all students to return to school at the same time for in-person, teacher-led instruction in a school building.

On September 3, 2020, the PCHD reported that local health metrics (as contrasted with statewide measures) did not yet support a return to in-person instruction for any students in Pima County at this point. On the contrary, PCHD provided the following guidance: *“We do not believe that it is safe to move into the hybrid phase of instruction in Pima County at this point.”*

The PCHD metrics includes disease transmission, healthcare system status, and public health system status as benchmarks for the current status of the pandemic. PCHD has indicated that it will approve a hybrid phase of instruction when all metrics on its COVID-19 Progress Report (<https://webcms.pima.gov>) are in a combination of the “Criteria Met” (green) and “Progress” (yellow) indicators to show that our County is on a trend for progress in slowing the spread of COVID-19.

Currently, there is one (1) metric in the “Criteria Not Met” (red) on the Pima County COVID-19 Progress Report.



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What is Needed to Transition to Learning in a School Building?

The health pandemic is a complex issue. PCHD has said that there has been significant progress in public health conditions over the last month, which it attributes to the additional safety precautions put in place for physical distancing and face coverings being largely used by the public. PCHD has indicated that if current trends continue, the county may have all green or yellow indicators by the end of September. Should this occur, PCHD anticipates that school districts with appropriate mitigation protocols in place can reopen for in-person learning in October 2020.

On Monday, September 14, 2020, PCHD added to their previous guidance stating unequivocally that it will be until late October or early November before they will be able to even predict when the health care conditions in Pima County will warrant the resumption of full-time in-person learning for all students. They emphatically advised that through the entirety of October, it will be safe to engage in hybrid model instruction, and that is the only approach they recommend for the entirety of October.

The hybrid model consists of students being divided into cohorts with only certain cohorts attending school on certain days, with the other cohorts still receiving instructional services remotely at that same time, and then the cohorts reversing those modalities on alternating days.

District Mitigation Plan

Regardless of the modality of instruction employed, Amphitheater Public Schools, like virtually every public business or service provider in our community, has substantially modified its practices in nearly every area of operation to help ensure the safety of our students, staff and community. Any return of students to our campuses – in hybrid or full-time in-person models – will be partnered with the implementation of these revised practices and protocols.

The District has established a mitigation plan for schools that complies with guidelines established by the PCHD. The mitigation plan, among other things, provides for the following additional safety protocols at schools during the COVID-19 pandemic:

Cleaning and Sanitization

- ✓ All desks and chairs will be cleaned every day in elementary schools and after every class in secondary schools. Students can assist with the cleaning of their own desks. Teachers can spray, and students can wipe desks.
- ✓ Hand sanitizer and/or soap and water will be available in every classroom, in offices, and in common areas.
- ✓ Alcohol wipes will be available to sanitize computer keyboards and other devices where sharing is necessary.
- ✓ Ventilation of classrooms with outside air will be increased to the extent possible.
- ✓ Libraries, maker spaces, and other common instructional areas will require handwashing/sanitizing before entering.
- ✓ Libraries will set aside returned items for the time period recommended by the CDC before handling.
- ✓ A COVID-19 Response Team has been formed that can respond to a suspected case of COVID-19 to provide deep sanitizing of necessary areas.
- ✓ Additional custodial staffing and grounds-keeping duties will be hired for added cleaning of facilities and playground equipment (touchpoints).



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PPE/Health and Safety

- ✓ Face coverings are required by Pima County and Governing Board policy, and compliance will be enforced for all staff and students.
- ✓ Reusable cloth face masks have been provided to staff.
- ✓ The District has received donations of more than 3,000 face masks for student use.
- ✓ Special face coverings have been provided by Student Services for use with children who have special needs.
- ✓ Parents are responsible for determining their child's health status before arriving at school. The District will provide a checklist to guide such determination.
- ✓ Parents are required to keep their child at home should they present with any symptoms of illness.
- ✓ Any staff member exhibiting signs of illness must stay home.
- ✓ The District has adjusted HVAC systems to pull in a maximized amount of outside air in accordance with CDC ventilation guidelines.
- ✓ The District continues to change its air filters on a scheduled basis.
- ✓ School health offices have been equipped with additional PPE to meet potential need.
- ✓ Health offices have been reconfigured as necessary to ensure separation of ill persons from well persons.
- ✓ Additional training and back up personnel will be provided to ensure continuity of health services.
- ✓ Protocols and guidelines for prompt responses to COVID positive cases on campus have been created.

Contact Limitation

- ✓ Classrooms will be cleared of excess furniture and other materials to allow for desks/tables to be spaced as far apart as possible.
- ✓ Seating will be arranged to allow for physical distancing as feasible, with students facing the same direction.
- ✓ The number of students in common areas will be minimized. Expanded cafeteria space will be provided by adding tables outside (middle and high schools). Tables will be added inside elementary cafeterias.
- ✓ Elementary students will eat with their grade level cohort.
- ✓ There will only be very limited volunteers/visitors on campuses. Only program volunteers will be permitted. Parents must drop students off at the gate/parent drop off and not enter the campus/buildings.
- ✓ Recesses will be staggered to allow for students to remain in their cohort groups.
- ✓ Large gatherings will be cancelled or postponed.
- ✓ Social distancing will be complied with to every extent possible in all contexts: lunch lines, hallways, etc.

Communication

- ✓ Amphitheater has published guidelines for staff and students to facilitate the establishment of routines and procedures.
- ✓ Teachers will communicate with parents through District email or by phone.
- ✓ The District maintains an email hotline (answers@amphi.com) for questions and concerns.
- ✓ The District will provide regular updates on public health impacts on educational operations.
- ✓ The District will provide information, as permitted by health information confidentiality restrictions, regarding incidents of COVID-19 outbreak.



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Transportation

- ✓ Masks are required on all District transportation and on contracted transportation for students and staff, with the exception of those with specific health conditions.
- ✓ The District will provide masks to students when boarding the bus when they forget to bring one.
- ✓ Students will sit no more than two to a seat with a maximum capacity of 56 students per bus.
- ✓ Select windows will be open on buses to improve ventilation and fresh air.
- ✓ Parents are encouraged to plan for transportation from and to the same bus stop during the pandemic.
- ✓ Bus passes may be issued to manage enrollment in transportation services. Passes should be integrated with identification badges.
- ✓ Buses will be sanitized after morning and afternoon runs.
- ✓ Contracted transportation providers will be required to match District mitigation efforts.
- ✓ The District will encourage families to carpool to decrease the number of children riding buses.
- ✓ The District will implement necessary precautions and mitigation efforts when transporting special needs and medically fragile students.

Food and Nutrition

- ✓ Lunch will be served in school food service facilities.
- ✓ Elementary students will eat with their grade level cohorts.
- ✓ Additional tables will be placed in the cafeterias to allow for social distancing, and additional tables will be placed outside at middle and high schools.
- ✓ Tables will be sanitized between servings.
- ✓ Food sharing will be discouraged.
- ✓ School lunches will be pre-placed on tables to avoid lines and promote social distancing.
- ✓ Lunch times will be staggered to minimize number of elementary students in cafeterias at the same time.
- ✓ Grab and Go lunches will be available in multiple lines to minimize congregation.
- ✓ Salad bars and self-serve items will be temporarily eliminated.
- ✓ Hiring of additional staff to assist with sanitizing and removal of food trash.
- ✓ Visitors will not be allowed in the cafeteria until further notice.

Educational Services

- ✓ Full-time online education available through K-12 Amphi Academy Online.
- ✓ In-person field trips, and student and staff travel will be postponed.
- ✓ Use of shared materials will be limited.

Additional Family and Staff Guidance and Protocols

In addition to the foregoing, Amphitheater Public Schools has developed two separate COVID-19 handbooks for staff and students that clarify safety protocols during the pandemic. They also identify the procedures to be followed if a student or staff member develops COVID-19 symptoms or receives a positive test result. As part of the District's mitigation plan, these handbooks are available for public review at www.amphi.com.



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Plan to Transition to In-Person Learning in School Buildings

With this background in mind, the Administration recommends that Amphitheater Public Schools initiate plans to reopen its schools to students for in-person, teacher-led instruction in the school buildings. Again, this transition will only apply to the students who have elected the in-person learning alternative and therefore are currently participating in Remote Learning by Necessity.

The clarity of the public health conditions for the entirety of the month of October offered by PCHD today, however, makes clear that in-person instruction must begin in a hybrid model, if the District is to open for in-person instruction on October 12, 2020. From information received today, it appears that other Pima County school districts are beginning their in-person instruction in hybrid models.

Because PCHD has now advised in-person learning will be safe in October -- but only in hybrid models -- the Administration is recommending the reopening of schools for in-person learning using a hybrid model the week of October 12, 2020, following the Fall Break.

In-Person Learning Hybrid Model for All Elementary Grades

- *All students would begin in-person beginning October 12, 2020 after Fall Break using a hybrid model.*
- *Early out is moved to Wednesday.*
- *Each classroom will be divided into two cohorts (e.g., Cohort #1, Cohort #2), generally according to the first letter of the last name (e.g., A-K in Cohort #1, L-Z in Cohort #2). Some balancing of numbers may need to occur to assure as even a distribution as possible.*
- *Cohort #1 would come to school in person on Monday and Thursday all day on the regular full school day schedule.*
- *Cohort #2 would come to school in person on Tuesday and Friday all day on the regular full school day schedule.*
- *Cohort #1 would work on Seesaw/ Google Classroom assigned tasks, Waterford, i-Ready, projects, math and reading practice on Tuesday and Friday while at home.*
- *Cohort #2 would work on Seesaw/ Google Classroom assigned tasks, Waterford, i-Ready, projects, math and reading practice on Monday and Thursday while at home.*
- *Live lessons via ZOOM would be offered on Wednesday along with one to one or small group check-ins. Wednesday would be a shortened day (early out).*
- *Specialist classes would be offered at school on a modified rotating schedule.*

The following table illustrates the hybrid model approach for elementary schools:

<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>
<i>Cohort #1 in person learning</i>	<i>Cohort #1 remote learning</i>	<i>Live ZOOM Lessons Individual and small group student contacts Deep cleaning of schools</i>	<i>Cohort #1 in person learning</i>	<i>Cohort #1 remote learning</i>
<i>Cohort #2 remote learning</i>	<i>Cohort #2 in person learning</i>		<i>Cohort #2 remote learning</i>	<i>Cohort #2 in person learning</i>
<i>Modified/Rotating Specialists Schedules</i>				



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In-Person Learning for Secondary Students (6 – 12): Hybrid Model

- *Middle School and High School students would remain in Remote Learning by Necessity instruction until October 12, 2020, when they would switch to a hybrid model at the start of the second quarter.*
- *Students would be divided into two cohorts based upon their last name in an alphabetical pattern, after adjustments required to maintain balanced cohorts. (For example, the Hybrid Model would divide students into two groups, A-L and M-Z).*
- *Like the elementary model described above, the high school hybrid cohort would attend in-person or remote instruction via the following schedule.*

Monday	<i>A – L (In-Person)</i>	<i>Deep Cleaning of Campus</i>
	<i>M – Z (Access instruction through Zoom Live/Google Classroom)</i>	
Tuesday	<i>A – L (Zoom Live/Google Classroom)</i>	
	<i>M – Z (In-Person)</i>	
Wednesday	<i>Zoom Live/Google Classroom</i>	
Thursday	<i>A – L (In-Person)</i>	
	<i>M – Z (Zoom Live/Google Classroom)</i>	
Friday	<i>A – L (Zoom Live/Google Classroom)</i>	
	<i>M – Z (In-Person)</i>	

The secondary school hybrid model allows for:

- *Reduced class sizes*
- *Reduced lunch (cafeteria) occupancy*
- *Reduced transportation (bus) occupancy*
- *Fewer students in hallways during passing periods*
- *More individualized support when transitioning back to in-person learning*
- *Easier to configure classrooms while maintaining social distance*
- *Online routines could assist in easing back to full in-person learning*
- *Easier to keep campus clean and sanitary*
- *Social distancing is easier*
- *Creates an easier transition for students, staff, and parents when moving from online to back in-person*
- *If a campus is shut down, transition back to remote learning by necessity would be easier*

Amphitheater Academy Online Continuity of Instruction

As originally intended, Amphitheater Academy Online students will see no shift in their learning modalities. They will remain in their current online instructional setting through the balance of SY 2020-2021. Amphi



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Academy Online students may, however, make requests to transition to in-person learning after consultation with their school principal.

Reopening of Athletics and Extracurricular Programs

Athletics and other extracurricular programs are an integral part of learning. Our current learning modalities and public health conditions have obviously had a dramatic effect on these programs, essentially leading to cessation of all or most activities. The reopening of schools for in-person learning has always been the clear and ultimate trigger for restoration of such programs.

At the present moment, the Arizona Interscholastics Association (AIA) guidelines suggest that certain activities can proceed (e.g. conditioning and preparation), while others are still not yet safe (i.e. football competitions). Pima County Health guidance is more conservative in permission for athletics, particularly with respect to close contact sports. Anticipating a continued positive public health trajectory and the reopening of schools on October 12, 2020 extracurricular competitions should also resume as of October 12, 2020.

However, in guidance issued on September 14, 2020, PCHD made it clear that no athletic competitions in contact sports should occur until such a time as all public health conditions are at the “low-risk” level in Pima County. PCHD advises that only inherently non-contact sports which lend themselves by their nature to social-distancing protocol compliance should engage in competition while conditions of moderate risk still exist. Put another way, these non-contact sports are the only sports which should be competing during hybrid instruction.

Any restoration of athletic programs also necessitates consideration of when to begin formal (District-approved) conditioning, training and practices. In order for our student athletes to safely engage in competitions following the reopening of schools, they must be permitted to train and prepare in advance of those competitions.

It is therefore recommended that formal conditioning, training and practices be permitted to resume as of September 21, 2020. This could allow for three weeks (inclusive of Fall Break) of student athlete preparation before health and safety sensitive competitions resume.

Consistent with the guidance received from the PCHD on Monday, September 14, 2020, the resumption of conditioning, training and practices will remain at the AIA Phase 1 level until further notice.

Public and Staff Input into Reopening Plan

As we have previously done, the Administration will be seeking public input regarding the reopening procedures described above. Surveys will be sent to District families and staff to seek information regarding readiness to return to in-person instruction and athletic competitions under the stated timetables and conditions. This input is needed as it will serve to inform not only further refinement and development of this proposal for reopening but also, ultimately, Governing Board action regarding the same.

As stated above, this item has been revised based upon feedback received from our community. The District received considerable input expressing concern regarding class sizes and the difficulties of implementing appropriate social distancing given class sizes and classroom sizes. The adoption of a hybrid model will address these issues as well.



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What Else Can the Public Do to Help?

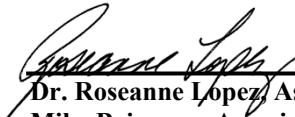

Many members of the public have stepped up to help our schools with everything from donations of masks, monetary donations for internet service for families, and more. These examples of our giving and caring community have been invaluable thus far and are greatly appreciated. Moving forward, particularly if we hope to reopen our schools and programs as described above, what we need more than ever is for everyone to:

- Wear a mask when in public and when in our schools
- Wash or sanitize hands frequently
- Maintain appropriate social distance
- Avoid large gatherings
- Follow other public health guidance as it develops

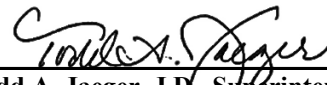
These mitigation strategies will help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and continue the improvements we have seen in public health conditions which will help us open our schools and keep them open. The children of our community need their schools, and we will continue to serve our community and its children. We appreciate the patience that so many members of the community have exhibited as we have traversed this fluid and changing situation over the last several months. We also appreciate the words of encouragement and gratitude offered for our teachers, staff, and administration who have done their very best over those months.

RECOMMENDATION: Administration recommends that the Governing Board approve the plan to resume in-person learning as presented.

INITIATED BY:

 
Dr. Roseanne Lopez, Associate Superintendent for Elementary Education
Mike Bejarano, Associate Superintendent for Secondary Education

Date: September 14, 2020


Todd A. Jaeger, J.D., Superintendent