April 14, 2020

Dear CGESD Students, Families, Staff & Community:

It’s been a little over a month since our CGESD educators and students were last together in school. While the announcement that school buildings were closed for the rest of the year was devastating to us, we want our community to know that school goes on. The teaching, learning, and support continue; it just looks a lot different than when we were all together.

Many teachers and leaders have been working hard behind the scenes to ensure a continuous, yet flexible learning plan for the remainder of the school year. There has been a lot to think about: logistics, curriculum, resources, staff development, technology, internet access, special learning needs, language barriers, communication challenges, home environment concerns, food insecurity, and the emotional and social tensions placed on students, families, and staff.

Although every school district in the county and state has had to grapple with this new approach to education, we have been working collaboratively to share ideas and develop plans that are accessible and equitable for all. However, the circumstances in Casa Grande Elementary School District present unique challenges.

Our principals, teachers, and support staff reached out to students and their families immediately after Spring Break, as they didn’t want to wait to come up with ways to ensure our students continued learning. But one of our biggest concerns was confirmed upon completion of these calls; over 1700 students in CGESD have no access to the internet or technology devices at home. Additionally, many of our students and families have been extremely difficult to reach.

The technology divide is one of our biggest issues. There is no question that our community has and will continue to have other significant challenges in the coming weeks – healthcare supplies and capacity, the small business crisis, unemployment, and food insecurity, to name a few. But amidst all of these challenges, let’s not forget how important it is for our students to continue learning and connecting positively with their teachers and with one another. After all, education is the foundation of our democracy.

Large and small technology and communications companies have stepped up, and most have committed to helping low-income students get internet access at little or no cost. Our district widely shared information about local providers and their services with families. Additionally, our Governor started a hotspot donation drive to help students across our state gain connectivity. But sadly, this hasn’t been enough to ensure access and opportunity for all CGESD students. In order to work around this, our educators and leaders have improvised with a variety of flexible learning approaches.

The innovative teaching, learning, and support we have witnessed over the past few weeks has been inspiring; from the slew of online and paper resources that have been assembled, to the books, supplies, and games that were distributed for students to keep; from the 3,000+ children receiving daily meals, to the many virtual meetings and professional development sessions attended by our staff; from the donations local businesses and individuals have provided, to the emotional check-ins between school leaders, teachers, and students. We are proud that CGESD has worked hard to put relationships before rigor, grace before grades, and people before programs.

We want our community to know about our commitment to the following:

- We will continue to do our best to support and educate all students
- We will continue to follow Individual Education Programs (IEPs) for our students needing specialized support
- Relationships play a big role in this era of flexible learning, as does our emphasis on social and emotional well-being
- Our learning focus will reinforce concepts and standards that are most critical, and could include weekly assignments, projects, and personal check-ins
- Both online and print resources will continue to be provided
- We are once again expanding our school meal distribution for children, and will now be serving grab-and-go meals 7 days a week
- We will continue to work with state and local partners to determine the best ways to help ‘catch students up’ on their learning when we are allowed back in our school buildings
- We are developing innovative ways to offer summer learning opportunities
- We are committed to explore, develop, and implement ways to deliver educational content using new technologies while working to bridge the technology divide
- We will continue to work hard because we want what’s best for our students

Most importantly, we continue to be flexible and ready to adapt. There is no instruction manual for anything like this. We are all just doing our best. We want all of our community to be in the know because we believe strongly that we are all in this together. Please stay in touch. The best place for updates is our website: cgesd.org.

We miss our students and want them to keep reading and learning.

Stay healthy and connected,

Dr. JoEtta Gonzales – Superintendent

David Snider – CGESD Board President