Planning for the Future: CGESD to Host “Virtual Office Hours’ in May for 2-way Dialogue with Staff and Community

Across the United States, many leaders have suggested schools won’t return to “normal” if/when we reopen our buildings in the fall. In CGESD, we are paying attention to the national and international landscapes and working with state and local leaders as we plan our next steps. We are considering ways to promote social distancing in classrooms, avoid crowds in cafeterias, and ensure students and staff alike are properly protected with masks and stringent health and hygiene measures. We are also looking into staggered schedules, new calendars, blended approaches to learning - where learning may happen through a combination of online and in-person experiences, different attendance policies, and social/emotional/academic support for students. We are preparing for a variety of scenarios and want to ensure our staff and community are aware and involved as we plan.

We realize that even though children appear to be less likely to have symptomatic cases of the coronavirus, families may be hesitant to send their young ones to a building with hundreds of their peers each day where they could become ill or carry the virus back home to more vulnerable family members. Similarly, our district must consider our teachers and staff in returning to work. With nearly 900 employees, CGESD is one of the largest employers in our community, and many of our staff members may be concerned about creating a vector for spreading the virus, or about their own health or the well-being of their loved ones.

These are unprecedented times, and there are many lingering questions without concrete answers. The guidance provided by the Arizona Department of Education, the Center for Disease Control, and other agencies at the state, county, and city levels will be followed closely as our school leaders work to develop detailed and practical strategies that ensure our prevention and safety measures are executed with the highest standards in mind.

As we do so, the issues we consider are not just about responding to the moment; we are also developing strategy and systems for both the more immediate and distant future. While we know the most terrible and lasting effects of our Covid-19 pandemic will of course be measured in the loss of life, we also understand that a parallel setback will unfold in the coming months and years; this one affecting our youngest residents. We are anticipating a school funding crisis that threatens to disadvantage a new generation of children; the very children who have already lost out on necessary socialization with peers and the opportunity to learn with a certified teacher present. So as we plan for re-entry to school, we consider all the ways we can leverage our funding while exploring multiple ways to focus on the knowledge, skills, and habits that matter most for our students.

We ask ourselves often, what will our students need to know and be able to do post-pandemic? How can we adjust our practices to ensure all their needs are met? What should we be thinking about as we prepare for the year(s) ahead?

To elicit input from our teachers, staff, students, and community, our district plans to host ‘virtual office hours’ each week throughout the month of May. Beginning May 4th from 9-10 AM, interested individuals may learn about the issues, ask questions, provide input, or share ideas with the superintendent and other CGESD leaders via an online video conferencing platform. Please check our website, www.cgesd.org for more information and a weekly link.
Our goal is to be prepared and ready for a seamless and healthy re-entry to school when we are given the okay to re-open. We appreciate the trust our families put in us and will continue to work diligently to listen to and share information with our community as our situation continues to rapidly change.

Sincerely,

Dr. JoEtta Gonzales
Superintendent