

JOINT STATEMENT FROM THE SUPERINTENDENTS OF THE GREATER CASA GRANDE VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICTS

November, 2020

The K-12 public school system of the Greater Casa Grande Valley encompasses the following school districts: Casa Grande Elementary School District; Casa Grande Union High School District; Sacaton Elementary School District; Stanfield Elementary School District; and Toltec Elementary School District.

As a group of schools and districts, we jointly span over 1,250-square miles, 10 zip codes, and we serve over 10,000 students. Collectively we employ roughly 1,500 educators. We share many of the same communities, neighborhoods, stores, places of worship, families, and students. We also share a similar vision and set of values for our richly diverse region.

As the superintendents of these districts, we all believe education changes lives and strengthens our communities. We collectively work toward systems promoting equity, access, and opportunity for all. We want every learner to attain high levels of achievement, and we understand that our families want quality schools that meet the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of their children. We understand our responsibility to prepare the future workforce of our region.

We all agree that our educators – our teachers, counselors, bus drivers, food servers, custodians, educational support personnel, leaders, and all other school personnel – are essential and instrumental to the growth and development of our students. We believe education is a ‘people’ business, and we work hard to ensure our workplace is positive and enriching as we recognize our districts as one of the largest employers in our respective regions. Every one of our employees has worked harder than ever to manage the new expectations and changing landscape associated with working and living through a pandemic. We love our jobs and the relationships we share with our community of learners and educators.

The Greater Casa Grande Valley has been hit hard by the spread of COVID-19. Many of our students, employees, and families have been negatively impacted by the virus. Our schools, hospitals, and other community agencies have all built in robust mitigation strategies, and yet each of us has felt the stresses of increased community spread. We share concerns about our children being fearful of getting too close to parents in self-quarantine, or families anxious about a loved one in the hospital. We also worry about our educators and medical personnel putting themselves and their families in harm’s way in order to care for yours — battling exhaustion and much worse in the process. These are the things that weigh heavily on our minds as we make decisions about possible interruptions and/or return.

For the past seven months, the Pinal County superintendents have met weekly with the goal of sharing knowledge, information, and strategy. Through collaboration and dialogue, we believe we make enhanced decisions and are better prepared to tackle some of the toughest issues our communities have ever faced. Through these meetings, we have come to realize we share

many common values for teaching and learning. We also share similar approaches to navigating the circumstances our pandemic presents. We value students, staff, and community. We also value their lives. There's nothing we would like more than to have our children return to many of the familiar pre-pandemic routines they enjoyed; but we recognize our responsibility to put the health, safety, and wellbeing of our staff, students, and communities first.

Although our target is to be fully aligned with regard to in-person, hybrid, and/or virtual learning approaches, we understand that the spread of COVID-19 has had varying levels of impact on the zip codes our communities serve. The size and grade configurations of our schools and districts are vastly different, as is the number of staff employed by each district. The science, research, and recommendations for return are broad enough to allow each district to accommodate our own unique circumstances and context. We want our communities to know that while we strive to honor our similarities and align our values, we also respect the unique approaches each district is taking.

Our optimism has been tested as we face the many challenges associated with this pandemic; yet we continue to be inspired by the resilience of our students, staff, and families. We remain resolute in our dedication and commitment to the Greater Casa Grande Valley and to the individual communities we serve. We will continue to meet weekly throughout the pandemic to ensure consistent collaboration and communication to our respective districts. We commit to continue advocating for equity and excellence during and after the pandemic.

As the number of positive cases continue to grow this winter, we share concerns about the well-being of every one of the individuals our schools and districts impact. We know school is more than just academics, and we vow to be a voice for our students, educators, and families as we go up against hard times. We remain dedicated to our communities, yet we will not waiver in our commitment to the health, safety, and wellness of our staff, students, and families. We invite you to join us in demonstrating patience, flexibility, support, and grace for one another.

Stay healthy and positive,

Dr. JoEtta Gonzales
Casa Grande Elementary School District

Dr. Steve Bebee
Casa Grande Union High School District

Dr. Cheryl Paul
Sacaton Elementary School District

Dr. Melissa Sadorf
Stanfield Elementary School District

Mrs. Denise Rodgers
Toltec Elementary School District