



# RAMAH NAVAJO SCHOOL BOARD, INC.


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## EXECUTIVE OFFICE

### MEMORANDUM

4 August, 2020

TO: Parents, staff, Ramah Community members, Ramah Chapter House

FROM: Mr. David Nez, RNSB Executive Director/Acting Superintendent 

RE: Welcome address

Dear Parents, Caregivers, Students, Staff, and Community Members:

Earlier in June, we invited all of our caretakers, students, and staff to take part in a survey to help plan our return to school this fall. We created a Re-Entry Task Force to research, discuss, plan, and create the Re-Entry Plan for school year 2021.

The community's participation and feedback was outstanding with many parents, community members responding to our survey.

The most highly-ranked thoughts fall into four specific priorities: protecting the health and safety of our students; a return to normalcy with in-school learning; equity in remote learning; and educational opportunities for all students.

I wanted to take this time to review each of the priorities as well as provide you with our current plans on how we intend to address them:

#### Priority - Protecting Health and Safety

Unsurprisingly, all participants: parents, and staff identified health and safety (reducing the risk and spread of COVID-19 as the highest priority). The health and safety of our students, our employees, and our community is our top priority. Some parents indicated they don't want their children to return to on-site learning until a vaccine was created. I understand your fears and concerns as I have 2 children who attend Pine Hill School as well. For those students we will have a 100% remote learning curriculum. We will be reaching out to all the parents in the coming days and weeks.

We have clear guidance from state and federal agencies (Dept. of Health, Centers for Disease Control, NM PED, Navajo Nation Response to COVID 19, BIE Guidelines) that we must follow in order to protect the health of our community. We are implementing strict cleaning and sanitation standards that follow these guidelines in our Re-Entry Plan to ensure our facilities are clean and sanitized.

Students, staff, and visitors to Pine Hill Schools must be screened on a daily basis for fever and other health indicators. Staff and students showing any fever or potential symptoms of the virus including coughing, sneezing, etc. must stay home or will be sent to Pine Hill Clinic for an examination that may include COVID 19 testing.

## Priority - A Return to Normalcy and In-School Learning

A common theme of comments and feedback from participants spoke to the challenges of learning from home. We are working towards having 100% of our students connected to the internet by the end of September and all of them in possession of Chromebooks, laptops or tablets. Students expressed concerns over not receiving enough guided feedback from teachers. Parents and caretakers talked about feeling overwhelmed by the combination of having to work from home and ensure their children kept up with their studies. We will be training parents, students and staff on BlackBoard, the Learning Management System we will all connect through. In addition, staff, students, and caretakers alike spoke to the importance of the social aspects of school from visiting with friends and classmates to enjoying the company of teachers and colleagues. We will be adhering strictly by CDC guidelines – all must wear face masks and we will abide by NMAA guidelines for sports.

CDC, NMPED and the BIE gave guidelines for the return to in-school learning for this fall. While this news likely provides relief to many families, we must stress that in-school learning will not look the way we remember it.

CDC, NMPED and the BIE's instruction have issued strict guidelines for preventing the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. These guidelines include strict social distancing and PPE requirements. For instance, masks and social distancing will be required for all students and staff. Again, school will not look quite like how it has in the past.

While it is the goal of Pine Hill School to return to face-to-face instruction for all students, it will be necessary for the new school model to be a hybrid of in-school learning, home learning and a hybrid of both. Some students on a 100% at home learning curriculum.

Public schools, BIE operated and tribally controlled schools must follow the guidelines provided by the state, s. If you have any questions, concerns, or comments regarding the guidelines, you may wish to direct your feedback to our acting principal or myself.

We will continue to keep you informed and updated as we learn more about in-school learning as well as extracurricular activities including athletics and clubs.

## Priority - Equity in Remote Learning

Pine Hill School has been working hard to switch to a remote learning model after the first news of the outbreak of COVID-19. Given the expansive and diverse geographic area the Ramah Navajo Band Land reside in, many families expressed concerns regarding future remote learning due to the lack of high-quality Internet connection and/or access to appropriate technology such as laptops or other computers. We are working with Oso Internet Solutions to get every student connected and every child with appropriate technology devices. We will also be providing training.

During the statewide and Navajo Nation-wide school closures, Pine Hill School ramped up its procurement of Chromebooks for students without access. In the fall, each student in grades 5-12 will be issued a Chromebook- right now we are waiting for the Chromebooks to be tagged and programed. We are also exploring different opportunities for internet access for students who do not currently have adequate internet access all the way into Unit 5. Should we need to reenter a remote learning environment during the next school year, we aim to ensure families who need Chromebooks and other learning tools will have them.

## Priority - Educational Opportunities for All Students

Another concern many of our parents and students expressed in the survey was related to how, even with all of the efforts to protect student and staff safety, there is still a risk. We want to be sure we provide the opportunity for a rich educational experience for all children within our community, whether they plan to return to the classroom for face-to-face instruction or prefer the opportunity to learn in a 100% home-based model or the hybrid model.

We offer rich opportunities for students who do not plan to return to face-to-face instruction through the Blackboard Learning Management platform, Moby Max, Acellus and NASIS.

Change is the only constant

The COVID-19 pandemic is very unpredictable. Information and guidance is changing as scientists and public health experts learn more about this novel coronavirus.

We are hard at work planning what school opportunities will look like come September 14<sup>th</sup>, when we will bring some students back onto campus. Until then, all of our Pine Hill Students will be on 100% remote learning. We will be handing out packets tomorrow starting at 10:30 am along with breakfast and lunch. We will be sending out the schedule on Face Book and our website. We will update you as these plans are developed in the coming weeks and months. Remember our Re-Entry Plan will be a living document and there will be updates as circumstances change. I also encourage you to regularly visit our website, Pine Hill Face Book, and check for One Call Messages for the latest updates.

In the meantime, take care of yourselves and each other, stay healthy, and enjoy the beautiful summer weather however you can.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David C. Nez", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

David C. Nez, Executive Director, Acting Superintendent of Pine Hill School and RNSB, Inc.