



Office of the Superintendent
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April 23, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I write on behalf of the Sunnyside Unified School District (SUSD) in support of the Restart S.M.A.R.T. post pandemic strategy that Higher Ground and its collaborators, including myself, has drafted. This proposal calls for reopening Arizona schools following the COVID-19 closures with increased and integrated awareness, assessment, and support of students' socioemotional learning (SEL), trauma, and executive function utilizing the Community Schools model.

I strongly support this initiative as I believe the community schools model will help develop communities to support their schools which in turn will increase the capacity of our teachers in Sunnyside to focus on the academic needs of their students. Additionally, I believe that the Restart S.M.A.R.T. strategy systemically allows us to resolve some of the existing issues that schools systems were already under-resourced to effectively address. The community schools design, with a school wide integration of SEL, along with early triaging in the summer is an even more pertinent strategy to ensure that an increased opportunity gap as a result of COVID-19 in our impoverished and minority communities is mitigated.

In order for students to succeed academically, they must arrive at school every day ready to learn. However, many barriers exist for Arizona students to achieve this state of learning readiness, and these barriers have only grown due to the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures as students have faced new and/or exacerbated trauma, dysregulated executive function, and socioemotional challenges. Ignoring these underlying issues when in-person education resumes is setting up our students for failure. Furthermore, as addressed in the RESTART S.M.A.R.T proposal, the groundwork for addressing these issues must be laid now to prepare for school reopening. I urge educators and policy makers to take the proposed measures under serious consideration in order to fully support Arizona's students for better outcomes now and in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Holmes", is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Steve Holmes
Superintendent