

Sunday, August 16, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

During this pandemic, the safe education of our students is a top priority. As J.O. Combs staff members, it was never our goal to cease instructional activities throughout the district; we want to teach our students in the safest way possible. Due to the governing board's vote, we have been forced to make tremendously difficult decisions concerning the safety and welfare of our students and staff.

On Monday, August 10, 2020, the Superintendent of the J.O. Combs Unified School District, Dr. Greg Wyman, made the recommendation to the district's School Governing Board to continue virtual learning for the remainder of the 1st quarter. The School Board denied his recommendation by a 3-2 vote and instead made the decision to reopen campuses to in-person learning effective Monday, August 17, 2020. After much discussion and review of the District's pandemic plan, a majority of the staff of the J.O. Combs School District agreed that it was unsafe for students and staff members to return to their respective campuses starting Monday, August 17, 2020.

Our position is based on the following factors: first, Pinal County has not met the state metrics (set by the Arizona Department of Health) determining that it is safe to reopen. The metrics are based on the mitigation of the spread of COVID-19; until these metrics are met, the risk of infection is too high. Secondly, not all campuses within the J. O. Combs School District are fully equipped with the recommended sanitization supplies necessary to keep our school sites properly cleansed. We also have not received some essential supplies due to the items being backordered. Until we receive the necessary supplies to maintain our inventory, we will remain at a higher risk of infection of our students and staff. Lastly, adequate and clear procedures have not been communicated to staff members regarding their responsibilities in handling students back on campus nor has there been any staff training on COVID-19 policies and specific sanitization procedures.

As a result of the above information, our position is as follows:

1. Any reopening to in-person school before the guideline metrics developed by the AZ Department of Health represent a serious disregard for the safety of both students and staff. We want all three metrics met before in-person learning is considered to resume.
2. We want assurances that the supply of PPE and sanitization supplies are not only ordered, but in the warehouse and adequately dispensed to each site in the district. Adequate supplies need to be maintained to where we will not be deficient from supplies running low. This is critical for our ability to follow the district's pandemic safety plan.
3. We want adequate instruction and training in how to utilize this PPE and sanitization supplies. This includes protocols for shared equipment (i.e. Chromebooks, computer labs, textbooks, manipulatives, etc.) which have yet to be communicated to staff.

Therefore, it is our firm position that the school board vote to approve the recommendation by Dr. Wyman to continue virtual learning through the 1st quarter, to allow sufficient time for the metrics to be achieved, backordered supplies to arrive, and all staff to be properly trained.

The Concerned Staff of J.O. Combs School District Represented by Dr. David Nelson, Tiffanie Carlson, Matthew Steele, and Barbara Rogers