

COVID-19 Toll

COVID-19 has taken its toll on our communities and schools, physically and emotionally. Although there are more than one million students in Arizona, 50,000 decided not to enroll in school this year. The Arizona Department of Education believes 30% of those were Kindergarten or pre-school-aged students. Deer Valley Unified School District's (DVUSD) internal data also mirrors this finding. We have also discovered that students moving in and out of DVUSD to charter, private, and neighboring school districts and back again are the same proportions they have been for the past three years. The difference this year was the movement of parents to homeschooling and/or alternative on-line programming; student safety was their number one concern. Teachers face two major hurdles when these students return to school in DVUSD: 1) correcting the academic gaps that were created from being in another educational system; and 2) aligning the previous pace of subjects being taught to DVUSD's standard, order, and depth of teaching.

The social impact on DVUSD will be learned over time as the impacted students progress through school. Books and dissertations will be written about the impact of COVID-19 on this generation for years to come. State data is already driving legislative discussions on how to catch students up for their lost learning. School districts that have not been in school since March of last year will fare worse academically than those who went right back to school. Those who braved the storm and went to school will be able to catch up faster, since the academic gaps will be smaller.

Academic gaps have also been magnified in student grades. News outlets have shown the number of subject failures for Arizona's K-12 students have increased significantly over last year, especially in economically disadvantaged communities. DVUSD's internal data shows an added twist; the pandemic affected all socio-economic groups in DVUSD, and was even more pronounced at the high school levels. Although the Governor and legislature are figuring out that students in Title 1 schools need more resources to make up for lost ground in a regular year, the new message that also needs to be grasped - the educational impact from COVID-19 reached ALL socio-economic groups.

DVUSD is setting up multiple academic intervention programs for students this spring and summer to answer these needs. Public schools are hoping the legislature and Governor will financially support these needs. As the pandemic subsides, our data is showing that former DVUSD students are returning at a torrid pace, challenging DVUSD to help these students get caught up as quickly as possible. Our outstanding teachers and staff are up to the task. Stay connected with your school on the opportunities to get plugged into the many intervention programs expanding daily at DVUSD. Working together, we can get back on the path to #extraordinary!

Dr. Finch is the Superintendent for DVUSD and can be reached at superintendent@dvsud.org