

FUSD remaining online for rest of fall semester

By Michael Manny November 20, 2020

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. – The Flagstaff Unified School District is remaining online for the rest of the fall semester, as COVID-19 cases rise in Arizona.

FUSD will stay with remote learning until the end of its second quarter, Jan. 5, the [Governing Board](#) motioned in its Nov. 10 meeting.

“We are experiencing COVID-19 in FUSD,” Superintendent Michael Penca said during his report to the board. “It is challenging for, and overwhelming at times for our team who investigate those and making all those contacts.”

According to the district’s [COVID-19 dashboard](#), there have been 71 total confirmed cases around FUSD since Aug. 17. The schools with the most confirmed cases are Thomas Elementary and Coconino High School, with 11. During the last week of data recorded, Nov.7-13, eight cases were reported.

Cases from students and staff not working or attending in person are still included, per the dashboard.

According to [Coconino County Health and Human Services’](#) data dashboard, 130 new cases have been reported in the county Nov. 20, and one death. That increases the cumulative cases in the county to 6,650 and confirmed death total to 153.

After meeting with administrators and holding staff forums, Penca said he could sense exhaustion with remote learning.

“I can sense some fatigue settling in with the way we’re operating, it’s challenging and also some hopelessness settling in,” Penca said. “We’re not feeling that, the data’s not trending to support that phased return.”

For the week ending Nov. 7, 532 positive cases were reported in the county. The following week, 509 were Reported – the two highest weekly totals since the pandemic began, according to [CCHHS](#).

The [district](#) must meet three health [benchmarks](#) from CCHHS, The Arizona Department of Education and Arizona Department of Health Services to begin its return to in-person learning plan. [Case data](#) must be less than 75 per 100,000 and have a percent of positive cases 5% or lower for two straight weeks, according to the benchmarks.

According to the District’s Nov. 20 [update](#), cases are at the substantial community spread level, with 263.2 per 100,000. Percent positivity is 7.9%, a decrease from 8.8% in the last update, but at the substantial level. COVID-like illness increased from 3.8% to 5%, at the moderate level of community spread.

Flagstaff High School Director of Theatrical Arts and Bands Shayne Smith said that the district is taking good precautions.

“I think the district and the administration have worked really hard to make us feel supported and comfortable,” Smith said, “They’ve given us safe choices to be able to be, you know, in our office or work from home, and that’s really big. I feel supported by my district. I feel supported by my administration.”

At the same time, Smith discussed the challenges of teaching his classes online.

“It’s become really difficult to teach something that is so interactive and so hands-on, and something that requires so much emotion, over a Zoom call you know, it’s difficult,” Smith said.

Despite the challenges, the theater and band programs have been able to find alternatives to their annual fall semester performances.

The drama club is putting on a production of ["It's a Wonderful Life"](#) in the form of a 1940s style radio broadcast. The show is being livestreamed Dec. 3-5 at 7 p.m., plus a 2 p.m. matinee the fifth.

The Flagstaff Eagle Pride Marching Band has put on a socially-distanced series of parades titled ["We March On."](#)

Throughout this year, Smith has tried to provide an escape for his students who are stressed about their other classes.

"The way I see my job, my role right now as a teacher is to provide some sort of self-care or an outlet, an artistic outlet for my students to just be able to escape their other academics a little bit and find comfort, and find joy and a little bit of relief in music," Smith said.

FUSD's last day of first semester is Dec. 18.

Source list

Shayne Smith, Director of Theatrical Arts and Bands, Flagstaff High School. ssmith@fusd1.org

Flagstaff Unified School District Governing Board Nov. 10 meeting. Phone: 928-527-6002

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