



March 30, 2023

Dear PXU Community:

It has been the honor of a lifetime to serve the broader Phoenix Union community for 22 years. Before coming to PXU, I served both the Roosevelt and Isaac school districts for nearly a decade. For the past 14 years - first as the principal of Camelback, then as Director of Leadership, and finally the last eight school years as Superintendent - I have given and shared my heart and soul with our staff, students, and parents. I have served alongside some of our state's and nation's best educators and leaders, including PXU's current Executive Team and slate of principals, the most committed group I have ever known.

I have spent one-third of my life and two-thirds of my professional life in Phoenix Union. The last eight years have been the most challenging yet certainly the most rewarding. Who we were then - PUHSD - and who we are now - PXU - are worlds apart.

Paper payroll. No timeclocks. Desktop computers. Sixteen schools. iPhone 6. Over 26,000 students. Minimum wage below \$10 per hour. Teacher salaries under \$40,000. TikTok didn't exist. Snap was in its infancy. You could still bank. No Zelle or Venmo. The newspaper was still the best way to get the news. No Zoom or Teams. No electric buses. Lyft turned 3. No free breakfast and lunch for every student. No Uber Eats. That teal logo with those faces and... was that a feather?

That Phoenix Union is not this Phoenix Union.

We have emerged from the pandemic – and that un-modernized era – stronger than ever. Our brand and our portfolio are nationally recognized. In September, we surpassed our highest single-day enrollment in over a half century. We have more A and B-rated schools than ever before and, for the first time in PXU history, no D or F schools. We led the city, state, and nation through the COVID pandemic.

We have 24 schools in our portfolio. Phoenix Coding, Linda Abril, Wilson, GTA at Maryvale, ARCH at Chavez, and Phoenix Digital have been developed and launched. PXU City is now forcing our country to think radically differently about the future of high schools. Phoenix Educator Preparatory will soon produce our state's most talented and diverse education workforce. The new property on Central Avenue will incubate even bigger and bolder ideas. We will soon launch the Phoenix Engagement Center.

Despite recent economic challenges, we have laid one of the strongest financial foundations in the nation - and now have the modernized infrastructure and technology to back it up. We have the highest school district minimum wage in Arizona. We restructured our salary schedules to put more money into the hands of ALL of our most deserving educators. We have our state's first electric bus fleet. We have an incredible strategic plan, and our commitment to equity is as clear on paper as it is in practice. We officially launched the Phoenix Public

Chad E. Gestson, Ed.D., Superintendent

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Schools Collaborative with our 13 partner districts to improve alignment. We are now in the national spotlight because we are a national model. The momentum is palpable. The future is certain and bright in PXU.

After careful and prayerful consideration, I have decided that it is my time to step down as Superintendent, effective June 30, 2023. I have offered to remain in PXU in a support role as long as is necessary to ensure a successful transition. I am leaving my role but not abandoning our PXU family. I will remain a PXU parent, resident, taxpayer, voter, supporter, and advocate.

Former PXU board member, Ian Danley, once spoke about the importance of seasons of the superintendency. The last eight years was my season. The next eight years belong to someone else.

I have spent 22 years working “in” the system. It is now time for me to step “out” of the system in order to work more effectively, aggressively, and unapologetically “on” the system, locally and nationally.

In Arizona, I will serve as the founding Executive Director of the new *Arizona Institute for Education and the Economy*. The *Institute* will launch at Northern Arizona University and will be located in the Phoenix Metro area. Education, the public sector, and the economy are unquestionably and inextricably linked - it’s time to put that fact front and center as we find solutions that will impact generations of Phoenixians and Arizonans. In addition to leading the Institute, I will also serve as a Special Advisor to NAU’s President, Dr. José Luis Cruz Rivera, on K-12 Initiatives.

Nationally, I will work to advance both policy and practice. I will continue in my roles on the Board of Directors of Chiefs for Change in Washington, D.C. and the Council at the Stanford University Hoover Institution Education Success Initiative. I will also continue to support the Carnegie Foundation in Palo Alto, CA, as Carnegie and districts across America boldly rethink schools of the future, including the Carnegie Unit.

In short, as I depart, I plan to become an even fiercer advocate for educational excellence and economic mobility in our city, our state, and our nation.

For now, my focus is on our PXU community - closing out this year, planning for the successful launch of the 2023-2024 school year, ensuring the continued stability of our work, and supporting the transition of PXU’s next leader. I am committed to an uncharacteristically smooth transition in the coming months and years - you deserve and should expect nothing less from me.

Finally, I want to thank our people.

First to our students. You are our future – future teachers, engineers, entrepreneurs, innovators, and change makers. Because of you – your passion, your vision, your commitment to each other, and your dedication to our community, our state, our nation, and our planet – I am more hopeful than ever about the future.

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Parents and guardians – you are our children’s first and best teacher. Push them, challenge them, love them, set high expectations for them. When they make a mistake, hold them accountable yet use it as a growth opportunity. Always stay engaged in their lives and their education, even if they encourage you not to – they don’t mean it. They need it. They need you.

I have long said that PXU has the greatest educators in our state and nation. I firmly believe that. To our education support professionals, our teachers, our certified support personnel, our association leaders, our assistant principals, our principals, and our district administrators – Arizona’s and America’s eyes are on you. Be bold. Continue to set trends. Love your students. Love each other.

To the PXU Governing Board, past and present. Thank you for your support of our collective efforts over the years and for putting students, staff, and families first, front, and center in every decision. Your love, selflessness, and support for our community will ensure that PXU thrives for years to come.

Last, but certainly not least, to the PXU Executive Team. I love you. Sincerely. Day-to-day, week-to-week, and year-to-year, we tackle some of the greatest challenges our city and nation has ever faced. We fight to prioritize our children, our families, our staff, and our district despite criticism, obstacles, and even tragedies. You deserve to be celebrated for your selfless and sacrificial leadership.

Thank you, friends and colleagues, for your trust and support. I am better today because of you. I am forever grateful.

Con amor y respeto,



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Superintendent

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