



July 30, 2021

Greetings, SUSD Families!

We are looking forward to welcoming your students back for the first day of school on Wednesday, August 4th. As noted previously, SUSD has been working closely over the summer with public health officials to review and revise our COVID protocols and mitigation strategies to ensure we are in compliance with all relevant federal and state requirements. It is important to note, just as it was last year, that these guidelines are subject to revision, based on new information from the Maricopa County Department of Public Health (MCDPH), the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and/or changes to state and federal laws, orders, and requirements. *We are expecting more information from MCDPH next week and will share that as it becomes available.*

Masks

Pursuant to a new Arizona law (A.R.S. § 15-342.05) and previous communication, **masks are optional for both students and staff as we return to school next week.** Recently, the CDC and the Arizona Department of Health Services recommended that all staff and students in Pre-K through 12 schools wear masks while indoors. Previously, the recommendation was for those who are unvaccinated to wear masks. With the increase in COVID cases and the higher transmissibility of the Delta variant, we will continue to communicate the recommendations of public health officials while also honoring the choice of students, families, and staff regarding wearing masks. This issue has been a contentious one for many, and it is our hope that we can model respect for those who have different opinions and practices regarding masks.

As previously noted, the [CDC order](#) requiring masks on school buses supersedes the new Arizona statute. The district has been advised by legal counsel that we are required to comply with this federal order. Students will be required to wear masks while riding an SUSD school bus. Bus drivers will have disposable masks available.

Vaccinations

State law prohibits school districts from mandating COVID-19 vaccinations in order to attend school in-person (A.R.S. § 15-342.05). However, it is *strongly recommended* that individuals who are 12 and older take advantage of the opportunity to be vaccinated. In Maricopa County, 98.3% of all COVID cases since the vaccine became available are individuals who have not been fully vaccinated. Breakthrough cases are at 0.2%, reflecting the effectiveness of the vaccine. As public health officials have continually noted, the best way to end the transmission of COVID-19 is to increase the number of people who are vaccinated.

Students under the age of 12 are not yet eligible for the vaccine. While most children who have contracted the virus do not have serious symptoms, this is not universally true, and the virus has continued to mutate. This is why it is imperative that we implement as many strategies as possible to reduce the risk of transmission at school so that we can continue to keep our classrooms and schools open for in-person instruction.

Layered Mitigation Strategies

There are several critically important mitigation strategies that will be key to having a successful school year while we are seeing [new, high levels of transmission in our community](#) (this is not intended to be an exhaustive list of the district's mitigation strategies):

- ***Stay home if you are ill***
First, and most importantly, we need students and staff to **stay home when they are sick and/or when a family member is sick with COVID-19 or COVID-like symptoms**. The Delta variant spreads rapidly, and so it is imperative that those who are sick do NOT come to school. Our nurses will contact families to send sick/symptomatic students home, following the guidelines established by the MCDPH.
- ***Quarantines***
MCDPH is following the CDC guidelines regarding [quarantine](#) and [isolation](#) for those who are confirmed positive cases and close contacts. The county anticipates updating its online information in the coming week or so. The decision to isolate and/or quarantine is made by MCDPH, and the district is required by law to exclude students from participating in school for the duration of the isolation or quarantine period.
- ***Physical Distancing***
Where possible, we will maintain physical separation of 3 feet between students to reduce the potential for airborne transmission of the virus.
- ***Ventilation Systems***
The district has further upgraded school building air filters by installing MERV-13 air filters to reduce the potential for transmission of the virus through our cooling and heating systems.
- ***Drinking Fountains***
Drinking fountains will be turned off to start the school year, but water-filling stations will be available to ensure that our students are able to remain well-hydrated. We will also have a supply of water bottles available at each school.
- ***Cohorting***
At the elementary level, we have been encouraged to cohort our students as much as possible so that if we have to, we can identify and isolate those who may have been exposed to a confirmed, positive case. Additionally, the MCDPH recommends continuing with our lunch protocols that maintain 3 feet of separation in cafeteria spaces, with students facing the same direction.

We know many of you are wondering whether you will be able to walk your students to their classrooms next week to make sure they get settled, and we invite you to do that. We encourage masks during this time, given the increased number of people on campus. Specific guidance regarding regular school visits and classroom volunteering in the new school year will be addressed next week as we gather additional information from MCDPH and update our COVID-protocols document. Any significant changes from last school year's strategies will be highlighted.

We look forward to partnering with you to make this 125th year of education in Scottsdale an outstanding one.

Sincerely,

Scottsdale Unified School District [Cabinet](#) and [Leadership Team](#)