



January 3, 2022

Hello, SUSD Families,

We are looking forward to welcoming you and our students back tomorrow for the beginning of the second semester and hope that each of you had a happy, safe, and healthy holiday break. As we start this new semester, I want to encourage a sense of community, where we acknowledge differences of opinion while committing to take specific actions to promote the common good. The beginning of a new year presents an opportunity to set a new tone of civility, kindness, and commitment to excellence in all aspects of our school community. While we all wish that COVID was no longer a topic of conversation, we can take steps to ensure that it does not overshadow what will be a strong finish to our 125th year as a school district. Thank you for your partnership and support as we navigate this journey together.

During the past two weeks, we continued to monitor developments related to COVID transmission and the omicron variant in order to ensure we are prepared with appropriate mitigation strategies. Transmission levels in Scottsdale remain at a [very high level](#) (both in terms of cases per 100,000, as well as percent positivity, which is now reaching a level that approaches the highest numbers seen since the beginning of the pandemic). Initial research continues to show that omicron is much more transmissible than prior variants, but appears to cause less severe illness.

As noted before the break, there are some changes to our COVID mitigation approach as we return:

- Masks will be ***strongly recommended*** for students, consistent with CDC, AzDHS, and MCDPH recommendations.
- In an effort to preserve our ability to continue to offer in-person instruction, all staff ***will be required*** to wear masks indoors.
- Volunteers/visitors will not be allowed on campuses until further notice.
- It is also recommended students who are a household contact of a positive case remain home for the prescribed period of time or provide a negative test result in order to return to school.
- We will be limiting assemblies and large, indoor gatherings during school hours.
- We will resume a school-by-school analysis of COVID cases to determine if/when enhanced mitigation measures may be required. These enhanced mitigation measures may include a mask requirement, should we see evidence of in-school spread of the virus.

With respect to ongoing mitigation efforts, public health officials have reiterated the following:

- Getting vaccinated is the best protection against serious illness related to a COVID infection. The MCDPH [website](#) provides helpful information.
- Universal masking (regardless of vaccination status) is recommended while indoors when community transmission is at high or substantial levels, as ours is.
- Individuals who are symptomatic - staff and students - should remain home. SUSD nurses will continue to follow the protocol of sending symptomatic students

home. Students will be allowed to return when they produce a negative COVID test or have completed the required days of isolation.

The Maricopa County Department of Public Health is working on new recommendations regarding quarantine expectations that will include a test-to-stay protocol. It is expected that these new guidelines will be available by mid-January. The CDC also issued new guidance for [test to stay](#) that will help reduce the numbers of students who are required to miss school as a result of COVID exposure. These guidelines continue to be revised and updated based on new evidence and will inform SUSD's ongoing mitigation efforts.

Community health partner [Embry Health](#) continues to offer its drive-thru testing at three SUSD-convenient locations:

- Oak Learning Academy campus, 7501 E. Oak St., Scottsdale – open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday
- Chaparral Business Center, 8840 E. Chaparral Rd., Scottsdale – open 7 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., 7 days a week
- Phoenix Camelback Seventh-day Adventist Church, 5902 E. Camelback Rd., Phoenix – open 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday thru Friday

Also, in partnership with *In Office Diagnostics*, drive-thru COVID-19 surveillance and diagnostic testing is available to all SUSD families and district employees at:

- Cherokee Elementary School, 8801 N. 56th St., Paradise Valley – open 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday
- Open Arms Church (near Navajo Elementary School), 4640 N. Granite Reef Rd., Scottsdale – reopens January 6

This testing is offered at no out-of-pocket cost to families or the district. All testing is completely voluntary.

It is important to reiterate our commitment to keeping our schools open for in-person learning while also doing what we can to reduce the risk of uncontrolled spread of COVID. The district has a long-standing policy related to communicable diseases ([Policy JLCC](#)), and the courts have recognized the right and responsibility of schools to maintain a healthy school environment by requiring individuals who are sick with a communicable disease to remain home until no longer contagious. While we understand that many people were looking forward to a return to normal without a mask requirement tomorrow, the current high levels of transmission with the omicron variant suggest that continuing to wear masks, *at least until this current surge subsides*, is the best approach to ensuring the least amount of disruption to in-person education. By working together, we can have a successful second semester.

Thank you,

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