



August 11, 2021

Superintendent's Message: Masking, COVID Testing and Vaccinations

Dear Parent, Guardians, Staff and Community Members,

We all agree that in-person school is the best place for our students to thrive and grow and we wish we could return to school like we previously enjoyed without masks and with very little worry about catching anything worse than a cold, flu or non-life-threatening illness. The very contagious COVID-19 delta variant, however, requires that we continue to implement existing as well as new health and safety protocols for the start of school. Everyone is passionate about their students returning to school and our planned health and safety requirements, even as there is not unanimity about the steps that need to be taken.

Our district is responsible for the safety, health and welfare of each and every one of our students and our staff and maintaining the integrity of the learning process as we navigate the inevitable and complex contact tracing decision-making required to limit exposure of COVID-19. As superintendent, if I err, I must err on the side of ensuring that we have been overly cautious and health-protective, not that we have fallen short and taken unnecessary risks in the face of this new delta variant. I must also use what is available to maximize and maintain the continuity of learning by doing our best to keep students and staff on campus throughout this journey.

Our school board passed two resolutions during our special meeting last night:

- For students: [Resolution requiring universal indoor and outdoor masking and regular testing](#)
- For employees: [Resolution requiring COVID-19 vaccination of all district employees, universal indoor and outdoor masking and regular testing](#)
- View video of 8/10/21 special board meeting: <https://youtu.be/TZYCgg4I9XU>

Like many parents, I feel sad that we must implement these measures in order to best ensure the continuation of in-person instruction for this school year. We are making the best of an unfortunate scenario. Please know that our district team will be caring and compassionate as we implement weekly COVID testing and masking requirements. We will do our best to ensure that testing is understandable, simple, gentle and not scary. While we will be requiring outdoor masking for unsupervised time where many students are congregating, we will also do our best to identify appropriate times where supervision and physical distancing is possible, making outdoor masking unnecessary. We will monitor the progress of the virus, and when it is appropriate to loosen our requirements, we will do so.

As I reflect on our meeting and on calls and emails from parents and staff, I am reminded that our attitudes as adults determine the direction of our students -- they pick up on our optimism

and positive outlook as well as our fears and anxieties. Parents play a huge role in teaching their children how to think positively and inspire optimism. Being positive 24/7 is difficult for all of us, especially during this challenging time, but we can all try to do our best to maintain an optimistic attitude. If we reflect gloom and doom and create anxiety about kids wearing masks, or getting COVID tested, they will be frightened and anxious. If we reflect on the positive aspect of these tasks, they will accept them and adapt, knowing they are contributing to the wellbeing of everyone around them.

Let's all work together to get our students off to a good start this year, encourage them and support them. Parents, continue to be your student's biggest fans, and our team will continue to nurture and support the whole child.

We have updated our Mental Health & Community Resources page and made it more user friendly: <https://www.smmusd.org/Page/6503>. Our resources include: wellness, mindfulness, sleep support, talking to children about COVID, and more. We are all in this together.

I look forward to a great start of the 2021-22 school year.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ben Drati, Superintendent