



January 4, 2022 (Clarification added 1/5/22)

## Superintendent's Message: Health and Safety on Campus

Dear Parents, Guardians, Staff, Students and Community Members,

I have compiled considerable information following our return from winter break. Please take a look at every section, as it impacts parents, staff and students.

In this update I will provide the following:

- Information about the new and adjusted safety protocols for K-12 schools adopted on January 1 by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH), including those related to isolation and quarantine
- Masking update impacting staff and students
- Planning in progress for use of antigen test kits provided by the state
- Overnight trips
- Attendance rates, staffing concerns and an increase in positive cases
- What we need to work toward in an effort to keep schools open as much as possible
- Vaccinations and upcoming Saturday clinics

### New Safety Protocols

The LACDPH published [new requirements and recommendations](#) on January 1, 2022 we are sharing for your review. In summary, the following are the most meaningful adjustments. Some will require significant coordination to execute, while others are in alignment with what our School Board previously adopted at the beginning of the school year.

#### Isolation

- The new guidance provides for students and staff who are required to isolate because of a positive test result to be released from isolation and return to school on the sixth day following the initial positive test result, provided that they have a negative antigen rapid test done on the fifth day and are not symptomatic.

This is a change from the previous 10-day requirement, however, **at this time we are continuing with the 10-day schedule. We are working on the process for recording and approving return to school on the sixth day as this is a significant shift in our protocol and will take some time to develop this system.**

The rationale for this is because the CDC has determined that the contagiousness of a person is not a threat by the fifth day, and an antigen test is the best mechanism for this detection. With a PCR test, on the other hand, a person can continue to test positive for three months after the initial infection because of the sensitive nature of a PCR test. The PCR test is still the recommended test for surveillance testing, but an antigen test is the best test for return to school release.

- We are working on a process to coordinate the tracking of isolation cases and designating staff members for this task. In addition to the testing requirement, students/staff have to wear a mask indoors and outdoors for an additional five days upon return to school. This requirement for masking indoors and outdoors is already a part of our district's protocol and will not need additional implementation. Other districts are not as fortunate, particularly in regard to outside masking.

### Quarantine - home or in-school

- Quarantine is required when a person is exposed based on the following criteria: in close contact for 15 minutes or more and within six feet during the interaction.
- A student or staff member who is fully vaccinated and asymptomatic does not need to quarantine at home. This protocol was in place before and will continue.
  - **Elementary Schools:** We are currently considering how we address the potential for classrooms that may have a combination of vaccinated and unvaccinated students. In this likely scenario a classroom will be split by (vaccinated) in-person learners and (unvaccinated) students who are required to quarantine and learn through short term independent study. More information will be provided as soon as we address the dilemma.
- Students who are unvaccinated must quarantine at home.
- Students and staff may also quarantine on campus (modified, in-school quarantine) when the following guidelines are followed: the contact with the positive case had to have occurred on campus, both the positive case and person who came into close contact were both properly wearing masks indoors and outdoors. We have followed this protocol since August.
- Also effective January 1, students who are required to quarantine at home can come out of quarantine and return to school on the sixth day, with a negative antigen test as described in the isolation section above.

### Mask update

- LACDPH has directed that within two weeks of the start of school, LA County districts must require students and staff to wear masks outside as well as inside. As mentioned, we have previously adopted a board policy for wearing masks outside, so we fortunately do not have to make any adjustments to our current health-protective measures.
  - **Students:** Students are strongly recommended to wear masks that are well-fitting, non-cloth masks of multiple layers of non-woven material with a nose wire.
  - **Staff:** Within two weeks of the start of school, all staff must wear a surgical mask at a minimum. Higher level masks, such as KN95 or N95, are also acceptable. The district will be providing staff with the appropriate masks or staff may provide for themselves.

### Antigen Test Kits

The first allotment of antigen test kits from the state for students arrived Monday, and the second allotment is expected later this week. These test kits were ordered by Governor Gavin Newsom and distributed to us through the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE).

We are considering how to best utilize the antigen tests to further expand our safety protocols. Fortunately, and unlike many districts, we have (PCR) surveillance testing established weekly already,

whereas many other districts will need to use the antigen test kits as surveillance. The dilemma most districts will have is how they manage getting staff and students off quarantine and isolation in five days if all the antigen tests are used for surveillance. We are analyzing our district's case rates we are receiving this week, and that will inform how best to deploy the use of these antigen tests from the state.

### **District Covid Dashboard**

We are currently constructing a new COVID dashboard for our district that we can manage successfully and accurately. It will focus on the number of positive cases we have each week by school site. We expect to have it up and running with this week's data by this weekend to reflect positive case numbers. Stay tuned for more information.

### **Overnight Trips**

Overnight field trips are not prohibited, but highly discouraged until the case rates are greatly reduced. We will continue to monitor our situation and will be discussing a possible plan to implement trips based on the conditions in our district as well as outside the district. An example of a positive move by our community is to get students vaccinated, as that may influence decisions for future trip planning. We understand that limiting overnight trips is very disappointing for many of our students who look forward to these special trips; however, health and safety continue to be our top priorities.

### **Attendance rates**

We are monitoring student and staff attendance rates this week at all schools. We are currently facing some staffing shortages due to staff / teachers / administrators who have tested positive and are in isolation. Student absence rates are a combination of positive cases in isolation and families who choose to keep students home until all students are tested through our weekly testing program. We offered the excused absence option to parents who are concerned about an immediate return to school, awaiting testing, or just returned from a trip recently and are playing it safe while seeking testing. We continue to encourage students and staff to stay home with any sign of illness.

We are confident that our practices will continue to minimize the spread of this variant. Transmission rates at school are extremely low based on our protocols that continue.

Evidence has shown that a multipronged prevention strategy that includes masking, physical distancing, testing, isolation of identified cases and quarantining unvaccinated students, and being vaccinated can help reduce transmission on campus. [The Centers for Disease Control published a document about Los Angeles schools that references this low transmission.](#)

### **In conclusion**

We are all aware of the surge in progress right now in both Santa Monica and Malibu and across the nation. We recognize that this month and February may be very disruptive and stressful with students and staff moving in and out of school due to increased cases, and we potentially face staffing and teacher shortages, with substitutes not readily available.

The contact tracing and work that will be done to release people from isolation and quarantine is a huge undertaking by our health and admin staff. To provide some context, the best way to mitigate this situation is by vaccinating students. Reminder: A vaccinated student does not need to quarantine after exposure, unless they are symptomatic. If, for example, 100% of our students are vaccinated, then our

health staff and admin's focus will be nearly 100% on the index cases, which will be a lot more manageable than having to contact trace and involve a large number of unvaccinated students, who will have to quarantine at home, even if they are asymptomatic.

**Vaccinated students = highest prospect for in-person instruction continuity + the lowest chance of disruption to classes.**

### **Saturday Vaccination Clinics**

SMMUSD is offering two Saturday vaccination clinics, Jan. 8 and 22, at the McKinley Elementary School parking lot on Chelsea, near Santa Monica Blvd. The clinics will run from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Information including registration codes / links will be emailed and posted on school websites tomorrow. We are working with our provider to schedule in Malibu, as well. Vaccination clinics are also available this week at McKinley (Jan. 5) and Malibu High School (Jan. 6), both 2:30 p.m. to dusk. Information / registration: [English](#) / [Spanish](#).

We appreciate your patience as we all work through this challenging time together. We are focused on maintaining in-person instruction for students and staff. Please do your part and have your student vaccinated, if you have not yet done so.

Please continue to look out for yourselves and each other.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Ben Drati, Superintendent