



## Superintendent's Message: Health and Safety -- 2021-22 School Year

Dear Parents, Guardians, Staff, and Community Members,

The first day of school is approaching, and I wanted to provide you with an update on district plans for our students and staff to return to school safely following summer break. I think I speak for most people in our district when I say that things were pretty tough last year with the physical closure of schools due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. The nation has learned a lot about how to reduce exposure to the COVID-19 virus and prevent its spread. As a district, we worked diligently to bring students back to campus for in-person instruction for specialized groups starting last fall, for all students starting in March and April, and for students participating in summer school.

We have consistently adhered to LA County Department of Public Health (LACDPH) guidance and consulted with health experts to ensure our protocols and processes comply with, or even surpass, recommendations from the health departments. In late March 2021, prior to students returning to in-person instruction in the spring, and most recently on [August 3](#), we held virtual webinars featuring a panel of experts, who provided input to enhance our safety protocols.

And while the number of cases in Los Angeles County reduced dramatically in the spring, the new, more infectious COVID-19 delta variant has caused the number of cases in our county to rise substantially. Therefore, based on the updated health and safety protocols and recommendations from the LACDPH, consultation with our panel of health experts, and our first-hand experiences with having students on campus in the spring, I will be recommending that the Board of Education approve the following safety protocols for SMMUSD:

- **Mandatory vaccinations for all eligible staff:** The more individuals who are fully vaccinated, the more we can prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protect our student and staff population who are not yet eligible for the vaccine along with those who are fully vaccinated. To ensure time for compliance and to negotiate mandatory aspects of this requirement, this mandate will become fully effective 45 days from adoption. The good news is that we believe more than 85% of our staff are already fully vaccinated.
- **Universal masking -- indoors and outdoors -- on all SMMUSD properties:** LACDPH currently requires universal masking while indoors. For maximum protection of our students and staff, and based on widespread health expert opinion, I am recommending that the masking requirement extend to outdoors during non-instructional activities, including but not limited to, recess, passing periods, lunch (when not actively eating), and before and after school. During outdoor instructional activities, such as PE, performing arts, sports, and other academic supervised settings (where a teacher or supervisor would be able to keep the students physically distanced and employ other safety protocols), staff and students will not be required to wear masks.

- **Mandated COVID-19 surveillance testing for staff and students on a weekly basis:** Details regarding the testing process will be provided prior to the start of school.
- **Mandated COVID-19 testing for any individual exhibiting symptoms:** If an individual begins exhibiting symptoms or has been identified by district health staff as potentially being infected with a contagious pathogen, they will be tested using an enhanced PCR COVID test through Bio Fire 2.1. This test will differentiate between COVID-19 and other pathogens with a rapid result to allow for improved contact tracing and limiting unnecessary disruptions to learning as much as possible.
- **Continued updating and implementation of SMMUSD's COVID-19 Safety Plan to align with the LACDPH school reopening protocols:** As we did last year when students and staff were on campus, we will continue to implement the county's protocols, as outlined in our district's COVID-19 Safety Plan. The SMMUSD COVID-19 Safety Plan lists measures that ensure infection control, including, but not limited to: an electronic health screening prior to arriving to school for all staff and students; temperature checks at elementary school entrance gates (no longer at secondary school entrance gates); time and space allotted for frequent handwashing and hand sanitizing; proper ventilation indoors; frequent and appropriate cleaning procedures; and exposure management plans that address various scenarios, such as the steps to take when a vaccinated or unvaccinated person is a close contact to a positive case, if a person becomes symptomatic while at school, if an outbreak occurs at a school, when and how to conduct contact tracing, etc.
- **Continue to encourage and provide the opportunity for students 12 and older to get vaccinated:** At this time, the law does not authorize mandatory vaccinations for students; however, we encourage voluntary vaccination.

With all of these measures in place, we -- district leaders responsible for the safety and well-being of our students and staff -- believe that our students and staff will be safe and protected to the best of our ability, and we will be able to maximize teaching and learning. We are looking forward to seeing our students back on campus, and we hope that we have the cooperation and understanding of our parents and school community.

The SMMUSD Board of Education will hold a [special board meeting](#) on August 10 at 6:30 p.m. to discuss and take action on these recommended health and safety protocols. I will be providing a more detailed description of all of the safety protocols at and in the days following the special board meeting.

In addition, Independent Study opportunities will be addressed at the upcoming special board meeting on August 10. At the August 3 webinar, questions were posed by the public about the independent study program. These questions have been addressed in this [FAQ Independent Study Program 2021-22](#) document.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ben Drati, Superintendent