

Dear Alachua County Public School Employees:

You've done amazing work to keep our schools up and running and our students safe during the pandemic. It hasn't been easy, and obviously we'd all like to get back to 'normal' as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the Delta and other variants to COVID-19 have changed things.

We continue to collaborate with our partners at the University of Florida and the Alachua County Health Department. We're also closely monitoring all information and recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other organizations.

As I'm sure you know, there's been a big jump in COVID cases here in Alachua County and across the state over the last few weeks. In fact, this past Saturday Florida had its highest number of new cases since the beginning of the pandemic. Florida also has the highest COVID hospitalization rate of any state in the nation.

Our ACPS family has not been spared. We've seen a significant increase in the number of cases among employees over the past two weeks. Some of them have been hospitalized, and I'm very sorry to report that one of our employees died of COVID-related complications this past weekend.

None of us wants to lose any more friends or co-workers to COVID. To protect you, your fellow ACPS employees and our students and families, we will temporarily require all of our employees, vendors, volunteers and other visitors to wear masks inside all schools and district facilities, beginning Tuesday, August 3rd.

Masks will be required regardless of vaccination status. However, those with a documented medical condition that prevents them from wearing a face covering can request an exemption through our Human Resources Department.

The mask requirement will remain in place through September 17th. We'll review case numbers, vaccination rates and other COVID-related data with our medical advisors before deciding whether to extend the requirement.

Vaccinations are still the best way to stop the spread of the virus in our schools and community. To encourage more of our employees to get the vaccine, we are working on an agreement with ACEA to offer \$100 to all employees who are currently vaccinated and those who get their shot(s) by September 17. We'll be sending out more details about this in the next few days.

Free vaccines are available at the Alachua County Health Department at 224 SE 24th Street on Friday, August 6 and Monday, August 9 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Fridays and Mondays after that from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. These are walk-up clinics and no registration is required. There are also several pharmacies around the county offering free vaccinations. For more information, visit <http://www.sbac.edu/vaccines>.

We also want you to know that for unvaccinated employees who have to be out due to COVID, either because they've tested positive or have had close contact with someone who has, the time off will now come from their own leave time. The district will only provide paid leave for fully-vaccinated employees who are out due to COVID.

If you test positive for COVID, please contact your direct supervisor immediately.

By taking these steps, I believe we can keep more students in school, more employees at work, and reduce the number of people affected by COVID. The sooner we do that, the sooner we can get back to normal.

I wish we could all move on from COVID. But until rates come down, I have an obligation to do what I can to protect the health and well-being of our ACPS community. While some options are not available to school districts, masking is something we can all do to protect ourselves, our co-workers, and our own families, as well as students and their families.

Thank you again for being there for our children and our community during this difficult time. With your support, I believe we can have a safe and productive school year.

Sincerely,

Carlee Simon, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Alachua County Public Schools