

Check-in from the Superintendent: Health and Safety, and the Upcoming Holiday Weekend

Dear APS Families and Students,

We're in our third full week of this semester, and it is truly wonderful to see our students back in their schools! In-person learning provides APS students with the best environment and supports for success.

We are committed to keeping up the positive momentum of quality, in-person instruction by doing our very best to minimize risk for everyone. That's why I'm writing to you today.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge how challenging this new season of the pandemic is for everyone. The promise of getting "back to normal" seemed like it was on our horizon in the spring. This is not where we hoped to be but we are here nonetheless, and we are prepared for the challenges that come our way.

I hope you and your loved ones can enjoy some quality time over the upcoming holiday weekend. Although APS has not adopted a 2021-22 travel policy, we will continue to follow the most recent [CDC recommendations](#). In an effort to help us preserve in-person learning, please consider postponing travel plans. I realize that is a big ask, so if you do travel, please participate in surveillance testing and if your child is sick, please keep them at home while awaiting test results. (You can always find the most up-to-date information about travel on our [travel guidance](#) webpage.)

Yesterday we announced that when we come back from Labor Day Weekend, we are moving to mandatory COVID-19 surveillance testing, twice per week, for all APS staff. You can [read more about it](#) on our website if you'd like the details.

Why? Because even if someone is fully vaccinated or has no symptoms, they may unknowingly expose others to the COVID-19 virus. Frequent surveillance testing can help protect students, colleagues, and loved ones at home. It is the best tool available to detect asymptomatic carriers.

The vast majority of our staff responded to a recent survey, and from that data we estimate that over 80% of staff are fully vaccinated. However, the number of staff taking advantage of surveillance testing is much lower than it needs to be for us to successfully navigate this school year.

We've considered several compelling factors in making the decision to mandate testing. ***The most compelling reason for me is the more than 20,000 students district-wide who are my responsibility, who are under 12 and therefore not yet eligible for vaccination.*** (More details about our compelling data points are at the end of this memo, for your information.)

Parents and families, we all have a part to play in the reduction of COVID-19 transmission and I thank you for supporting our mitigation protocols and following our student and community protocols as well. I ask you to continue to:

- Sign up your child for weekly surveillance testing at school
- Follow the APS daily wellness check
- Keep your child home if they are ill
- Get the eligible members of your family vaccinated if you have not already done so (APS middle and high schools will hold their second [vaccination clinics](#) for students and staff next week)

We believe we've gone above and beyond to do what is right as a school district. Together we can navigate these new COVID-19 challenges and get students back on track from the interrupted learning of last year.

The support and engagement of our parents and families is such an important part of this equation. Thank you for being a part of our APS community.

Yours in service,

Dr. Lisa Herring

Our most compelling factors for consideration for both mandatory testing for staff and exploration of mandatory vaccination for staff are as follows:

- 81.4% of employees who recently responded to our survey indicated they are fully vaccinated; out of approximately 6,000 employees we had 5,044 survey respondents.*
- Since July 17, 2021, 189 staff members have tested positive for COVID-19. Of those staff members that have tested positive for COVID-19, 50.3% (95 individuals) were vaccinated and 49.7% (94 individuals) were not vaccinated.*
- There is significant variation in vaccination rates for staff and students across APS schools (see the [“heat map” charts](#)).*
- APS has 20,012 students under age 12 enrolled in our traditional schools (as of Monday, August 23).*