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September 2, 2021

Dear WSD3 Families,

We have closely monitored school, community and El Paso County COVID-19 data over the past three weeks. We are using the [El Paso County Public Health Dashboard](#) to base the decisions on how to keep our schools open with consistent in-person learning and keeping our staff and students safe and healthy.

Currently, we have a significant number of students and staff with positive cases which have resulted in hundreds of students and staff quarantined across the district. These numbers include an active outbreak in one of our schools. Positive cases and presumed positive cases lead to quarantines for staff and students which takes away from consistent in-person instruction. To further punctuate the problem, we are also facing a significant substitute shortage in our region making it difficult to fill staff positions when they are absent.

**Therefore, beginning Tuesday, September 7th , there will be a four (4) week indoor mask requirement in all District buildings. We will look at data and re-evaluate prior to October 1.**

### **Why mask-wearing?**

Our goal to start the school year was to have as “normal” of a start as possible. Unfortunately, hundreds of our students were not able to experience normal. In light of the uptick in positive cases and quarantines, we believe adding an additional layer of mitigation is appropriate at this time. **According to El Paso County Public Health’s quarantine requirements, if students and staff are wearing masks and are exposed to any COVID-19 positive cases, they do not have to quarantine.** Although it is clear that we cannot keep COVID out of our schools, we can make every effort to minimize the physical, educational, social and emotional impacts of students missing in-person instruction.

### **What does this mean for buildings?**

- All staff and students are required to be masked regardless of vaccination status.
- All visitors, workers and delivery personnel must wear masks while indoors regardless of vaccination status.
- Spectators for indoor sports or events must be masked regardless of vaccination status.

### **Mask Exemptions**

- Anyone with a disability who cannot wear a mask, or cannot safely wear a mask, for reasons related to the disability.
- Children under the age of 2.
- Anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.
- Any staff or student who cannot medically have a face covering and has medical documentation and building approval.

### **Why four (4) weeks?**

Currently, most cases of COVID-19 illness in WSD3 directly result from students coming to school after being exposed by a sick parent or sibling outside of school. We are hopeful with the FDA approval for the Pfizer vaccine for those 16 years and older, and mandated vaccinations for the military, that we will begin to see less community transmission and lower incidences coming to our schools. As we begin to see higher vaccination rates, we will monitor community transmission rates within our zip codes. Prior to the four (4) week expiration, we will reevaluate our mask requirements to determine the risk of further outbreaks and quarantines.

### **When will this end?**

COVID-19 shows no signs of disappearing on its own. The most effective way to lower transmission and keep our staff and students in school is vaccinations. If an individual school or the district as a whole reaches 70% of fully vaccinated individuals, the need to mask or quarantine is greatly reduced.

We are hosting a vaccine clinic in our District at the SA Wilson Center located on 930 Leta Drive. **We encourage students 12 years and older, staff, and community members to get vaccinated.** Staff and students who are vaccinated no longer have to quarantine. Nomi Health will have the Pfizer and the Johnson and Johnson vaccine available.

- Saturday, September 25, 2021 - [Register Here](#)

Our goal is to provide consistent in-person learning for all students. We will continue to monitor all available data to make the best decisions to reach our goals. We realize that this decision will be contested by some of our families in the community. We ask that you please give us grace and patience as we navigate through this process.

Respectfully,

Kevin Duren  
Superintendent