



2021-2022

South Texas ISD

# Back to School

Project  
Safe Return  
2021



## STISD Project Safe Return – 2021-2022 School Year – Spring 2022

As our region, state and nation continue to move forward with reopening facilities and reestablishing a sense of normalcy, we at South Texas ISD look forward to welcoming our students back to our campuses this fall. According to guidance from the state, all STISD schools with the exception of our new STISD Virtual Academy will return to 100 percent in-person instruction for the 2021-2022 school year.

As we enter this next phase in our re-opening, we will continue doing all that we can as a district to support a safe and healthy environment, and we ask that all members of our district community assist with these efforts.

STISD continues to prioritize the health, safety and well-being of students, staff and all members of the district community, and has instituted the below practices and recommendations.

### Masks

- During a Special Called Board Meeting on Thursday, Aug. 19, the Board voted to accept and approve both local health orders and mandate facial coverings in all STISD facilities. Effective immediately following that meeting, STISD began requiring the use of masks, district wide, and for all persons (staff, students and visitors) while indoors.
  - o **Effective immediately, STISD will rescind our local policy requiring masks in public schools or, alternatively, not enforce it pending the Texas Supreme Court's disposition of the cases before it involving this issue.**
  - o **STISD continues to highly encourage the use of masks within district facilities.**
- From TEA's Public Health Guidance dated Sept. 17, 2021: *Masks (restatement of pre-August 19th guidance document)*
  - o Per GA-38, school systems cannot require students or staff to wear a mask. GA-38 addresses government-mandated face coverings in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Other authority to require protective equipment, including masks, in an employment setting is not necessarily affected by GA-38.
  - o School systems must allow individuals to wear a mask if they choose to do so.
- However, CDC has the following recommendations:
  - Wearing masks at all times while inside, regardless of vaccination status.
  - Masks must cover the nose and mouth.
  - A preferred mask is one that has multiple layers, nose wire, and is well-fitted on the face.
  - Gaiters and other makeshift masks are not permissible.

### Optional COVID-19 Testing for Students

Effective Monday, Sept. 27, STISD will offer optional COVID-19 student testing onsite at campuses. The testing is strictly optional, and it will occur on an as-needed basis, if the student's parent/guardian suggests the test or requests the test due to the student displaying symptoms. A test may not be administered to a student without a consent form on file with the student's campus. To allow for a child to be tested, parents/guardians must complete the STISD COVID-19 Optional Student Testing Consent Form, available through the COVID-19 section of the district website, and submit it to the school nurse.

***Testing is contingent upon the availability of tests, as the demand for tests is currently high. Please consult with your child's campus regarding the availability of testing. If your child is displaying symptoms, please do not send your child to school. Keep your child home, and reach out to your campus nurse for guidance.***

### **Vaccinations & Other Precautions**

- The district encourages faculty, staff and students to get vaccinated against COVID-19. The district has already provided vaccination drives for the district community. Plans to continue these efforts for the larger community are in place.
- STISD will continue to encourage social distancing to the extent possible.
- Employees and students are required to continue daily self-screenings, and should not report to school or the office, if experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.
- Students, faculty, staff and visitors are highly encouraged to continue with frequent washing of hands or using hand sanitizer, and sanitization stations will continue to be available for use throughout district facilities and buses.
- The district will continue with more frequent cleaning and sanitation of campuses.
- Desk shields have been installed on all student and faculty member desks.
- The district will continue to provide appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to health and safety policies.

### **Required Actions if Individuals with Test-Confirmed Cases Have Been in a School**

1. If an individual who has been in a school is test-confirmed to have COVID-19, the school must notify its local health department, in accordance with applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations, including confidentiality requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
2. Upon receipt of information that any teacher, staff member, student, or visitor at a school is test-confirmed to have COVID-19, the school must submit a report to the Texas Department of State Health Services via an online form. The report must be submitted each Monday for the prior seven days (Monday-Sunday).
3. Consistent with school notification requirements for other communicable diseases, and consistent with legal confidentiality requirements, schools must notify all teachers, staff, and families of all students in a classroom or extracurricular or after-school program cohort if a test-confirmed COVID-19 case

is identified among students, teachers or staff who participated in those classrooms or cohorts.

**Students Who Have COVID-19 – based upon TEA's Public Health Guidance dated Jan. 7, 2022**

As provided in this Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Rule, school systems must exclude students from attending school in person who are actively sick with COVID-19, who are suspected of being actively sick with COVID-19, or who have received a positive test result for COVID-19, and must immediately notify parents if this is determined while on campus.

Parents must ensure they do not send a child to school on campus if the child has COVID-19 symptoms or is test-confirmed with COVID-19, until the conditions for re-entry are met. See the DSHS rule for more details, including the conditions for ending the exclusion period and returning to school.

During the exclusion period, the school system may deliver remote instruction consistent with the practice of remote conferencing outlined in the proposed Student Attendance Accounting Handbook (SAAH) rules, as described here.

To help mitigate the risk of asymptomatic individuals being on campuses, school systems may provide and/or conduct recurring COVID-19 testing using rapid tests provided by the state or other sources. Testing can be conducted with staff. With prior written permission of parents, testing can be conducted with students.

**Students Who Are Close Contacts – based upon TEA's Public Health Guidance dated Jan. 7, 2022**

As a reference, close contact determinations are generally based on guidance outlined by the CDC, which notes that individuals who are fully vaccinated may not need to follow the stay-at-home period.

As noted above, public health authorities will be notified of all positive cases in schools. While school systems are not required to conduct COVID-19 case investigations, local public health entities have authority to investigate cases and are currently engaged in cooperative efforts on that front. Participation by individuals in these investigations remains voluntary. If school systems are made aware that a student is a close contact, the school system must notify the student's parents.

School systems may choose to require household-based close contact students to stay at home during the below stay-at-home period if they are in an area with high or rising COVID case rates. This applies specifically to students who are close contacts because an individual who lives in the same household is COVID-19 positive.

Independent of whether a school system chooses to implement the above requirement, parents of students who are determined to be close contacts of an individual with COVID-19 may opt to keep their students at home during the recommended stay-at-home period. In cases when it is permitted, parents who opt to send their children to school in the two weeks following exposure are encouraged to closely monitor their children for symptoms.

For individuals who are determined to be close contacts, a 14-day stay-at-home period was previously advised by the CDC based on the incubation period of the virus. The CDC has since updated its guidance, and the stay-at-home period can end for students experiencing no symptoms on Day 10 after close contact exposure, if no subsequent COVID-19 testing is performed.

Alternately, students can end the stay-at-home period if they receive a negative result from a PCR acute infection test after the close contact exposure ends.

During the stay-at-home period, the school system may deliver remote instruction consistent with the practice of remote conferencing outlined in the proposed Student Attendance Accounting Handbook (SAAH) rules, as described here.

**Staff Who Have COVID-19 or Who are Close Contacts – based upon TEA's Public Health Guidance dated Jan. 7, 2022**

Similar to students, school systems must exclude staff from attending school in person who are actively sick with COVID-19, who are suspected of being actively sick with COVID-19, or who have received a positive test result for COVID-19. Based on recent updates from the CDC, staff may return when:

- If symptomatic, at least 5 days have passed since symptom onset, and fever free\*, and other symptoms have improved.
- For those with no symptoms, at least 5 days after the day they tested positive.

\*Fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever suppressing medications. Fever is a temperature of 100° Fahrenheit (37.8° Celsius) or higher.

Staff who meet the close contact threshold with a COVID-19 positive individual and are in one of the following groups, do not need to stay at home.

- Ages 18 or older and have received all recommended vaccine doses, including boosters and additional primary shots for some immunocompromised people.
- Was confirmed COVID-19 positive within the last 90 days and has fully recovered.

For staff who meet the close contact threshold with a COVID-19 positive individual who are not in one of the above groups, it is recommended that the school system require that staff remain off campus during the stay-at-home period, but this is a local employment policy decision. If these staff continue to work on campus, rapid testing must be performed periodically for 5 days post-exposure, with testing on the 5th day recommended.

### **Remote Conferencing for Students Out Due to COVID-19**

For students who have to remain off campus due to COVID-19 illness or exposure (close contact with someone test-confirmed with COVID-19), STISD will offer Remote Conferencing instruction for those students, if the parent chooses this option for their child. Remote conferencing will be set up following the guidelines from TEA, and will include four hours of direct monitoring per day for the student. The main concern is certainly each child's health and wellbeing, and students are not required to participate in this instruction while they are out. Regardless of whether or not they participate in Remote Conferencing while out, campus administration and teachers will work with all students to ensure they get caught up with their school work once they return to campus after their exclusion period. The campus will reach out to families about the opportunity for Remote Conferencing, in the event that a student qualifies for this method of instruction due to the need to remain off-campus.

### **Social and Emotional Resources**

The level of uncertainty inherent in the COVID-19 pandemic has been anxiety-provoking. Most people are experiencing some degree of re-entry anxiety when returning to work or school. STISD is prepared to provide STISD families needed mental health supports, as we are staffed with School Counselors, Social Workers, Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC), and a Licensed Specialist in School Psychology (LSSP). Due to current circumstances, service may be provided by means of Telemental health. Telemental health involves the use of available technology resources, such as telephone or video conferencing. Should you feel the need to receive these services, please contact your school's counseling center. A form to request a telemental health session is available along with resources on the district website: [www.stisd.net/parents/health-and-wellness](http://www.stisd.net/parents/health-and-wellness).

Our counselors throughout the district have created resources that address topics important to our students and families, including dealing with anxiety, mental health, tips for adjusting to change, and staying safe. These resources and more are available through the district website at <https://www.stisd.net/parents/health-and-wellness>. Parent/student wellness meetings are also held periodically.

### **Food Services**

- STISD has been approved through a waiver from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to offer free healthy meals to all STISD students at all campuses during the 2021-2022 school year, regardless of household income. For this school year, STISD is able to offer meals at no cost to our students through June 30, 2022.
- STISD will continue to encourage the use of student ID cards for facilitating the serving of meals to limit the use of hands touching the keypads.
- STISD will also continue using disposable plates and utensils for the serving of meals.

*STISD's plan is based upon guidelines from the Texas Education Agency and Department of State Health Services.*

### **Review and Updating of Plan**

This plan is a living document, and the district will continue to review it weekly and make any necessary modifications based upon the most recent conditions and guidance. The most up-to-date plan will always be posted on the district website within the COVID-19 section.