



Sumner County Board of Education

Del R. Phillips III, Ph.D.

Director of Schools

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August 20, 2021

SCS Parents and Families,

I want to share some information with our school communities regarding our past and current COVID protocols as well as some changes that will begin on Monday, August 23. During the 2020-21 school year, our school system and school communities fought hard to keep students in school – learning and socializing with the best possible safety parameters. I think everyone on our SCS Team, our teachers, students, parents, nurses, staff and campus leaders did a phenomenal job.

Over the last 18 months, Sumner County Schools has been assisting the health department with contact tracing and will continue to do so. As our district concluded the 2020-21 school year, we communicated to the health department that we would be relying on them to take the lead in their role of public health management which includes COVID contact tracing. It's important to realize that they are the entity charged, [by TN law](#), to perform that function. The sole mission of this state organization is to improve and protect public health. We are all relying on them to do their job and do it well.

As we've begun this school year, we are all frustrated and also disappointed in the timeliness and credibility of the notifications provided to parents by our local health department. We hear and understand parents' concerns that you are not getting information from the health department in a timely manner. My team has been in frequent communication with our local health department, both leading up to the start of the school year, as well as over the past two weeks, to help improve their process for parent notification. Bottom line, their poor performance impacts parents' access to critical information necessary to make informed decisions for your student.

What are we as a school district going to do to help improve this process? Beginning Monday, August 23, Sumner County Schools will notify parents via SchoolMessenger when we have been made aware that an individual in their student's classroom has tested positive. We believe notifying parents of potential exposure in a more timely manner than the health department's current process will give parents the ability to monitor their student for symptoms and to make the best medical decision for them. Close contact tracing and issuing quarantine recommendations remain the responsibility of the health department. The local health department has informed parents that they haven't had access to the information needed to effectively contact trace. This is simply not true. To be clear, Sumner County Schools has always provided all requested information immediately to the local health department, which we are legally required to do.

In order to streamline the health department's contact tracing process, we will take an additional step and provide our local health department leadership limited access to class rosters and parent contact information in our student information database. This will give them a direct link to all the necessary information they need to successfully contact trace positive cases.

Board of Education Members

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We have asked our local, regional, and state health officials for clarification regarding quarantine periods. The school district's position has been to enforce quarantine periods for close contacts based on a [directive from the TDOH dated September 18, 2020](#). On August 18, 2021, we received new communication from [TDOH](#) that quarantines for asymptomatic close contacts, as a result of contact tracing, are recommended. Therefore, we are relying on parents to make the best decision for their student if they have been in close contact with a positive individual but remain asymptomatic. Please keep your student home if they are showing symptoms. If a student becomes symptomatic at school, our nurses will follow the same procedure as for any school-day student illness. The student will be separated from their class, and the parent will be notified to come pick up their student. Any individual who tests positive will be required to complete their isolation period per [TDOH guidelines](#).

Until further notice, we will return to limiting visitors in schools during the school day including, but not limited to, lunchrooms and assemblies. We will continue to follow TSSAA guidelines regarding athletics.

We have received many calls and emails from parents across our county expressing their opinion regarding masks in school. Governor Bill Lee issued an [order](#) this week requiring all school districts to allow parents to choose if their students wear masks while at school. In light of the Governor's Order, masks will continue to remain a parent's choice in Sumner County Schools.

We have also fielded questions from parents about why we haven't transitioned to hybrid or remote learning. The simple answer – we can't. The State Board of Education, not our local board of education, passed a policy effective on [July 21, 2021](#) that school districts no longer have the ability to change learning formats within the school year without the Governor specifically declaring a state of emergency allowing districts to do so. We simply don't have that option this school year.

As we continue working together to ensure our students can safely attend school, Sumner County Schools will implement the following changes to help parents have timely information about a positive case in their child's classroom and be consistent with guidance from TDOH regarding quarantines.

1. Notify parents via SchoolMessenger when we have been made aware of a positive case within your student's classroom.
2. Provide selected local health department leadership limited access to our student database including class rosters and complete contact information.
3. Support recommended quarantine periods for students and staff, consistent with guidance from Tennessee Department of Health. ([TDOH quarantine recommendations](#))

It is our hope that this will help clarify the process and these changes will give parents needed information in a more timely manner.

Respectfully,

Dr. Del R. Phillips, III

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