



Sumner County Board of Education

Del R. Phillips III, Ph.D.

Director of Schools

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SCS Team, Parents, and Families,

I want to personally wish all of you the best as we begin the 2020 holiday season. It has been a challenging year, but with your help and support our school system has risen to the challenge of safely educating our children during this unprecedented time.

As we reflect on the past few months and prepare for the upcoming spring semester, I want to share some information about where we've been and my thoughts on the upcoming school term. Our school leaders, teachers, and staff did a tremendous job outlining a campus specific plan to manage COVID-19 across our campuses. Each school implemented their specific plan with an extremely high degree of success. Our staff worked hard to mitigate the spread of the virus, but we realize it takes more than just us doing our part. It takes everyone within our community doing their part personally to substantially reduce the number of new cases in our county. We continue to encourage everyone to do their part to help defeat this virus and slow its spread and impact.

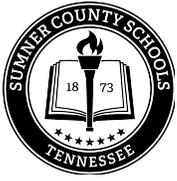
Thinking specifically about our plan and how it worked, we knew active cases had a high probability to increase after fall break, leading into the Thanksgiving and Winter Holidays. That was something widely discussed and predicted not only in Tennessee but across the country. These predictions held true. We saw the active number of cases begin to slowly increase between fall break and Thanksgiving. On the Wednesday prior to the Thanksgiving holiday I made the decision, based on the trend of active cases, to move to an extended hybrid learning model. I felt the rise in cases made that transition necessary, so I made the call based on the trending data so parents would have time to plan. We reduced capacity for our indoor athletic events, and we are currently reviewing additional measures to hopefully allow athletes to continue competing in the safest way possible.

We have implemented quick access to testing for staff. All staff within SCS will have an opportunity to take a free COVID-19 test at our health clinics or in their school buildings where they work administered by our school nursing staff. Quick, easy, and free access to testing will dramatically reduce the lag time between close contact, symptoms, and a known result. We hope this will reduce the number of close contact exposures and lost classroom time moving forward.

As we approach this holiday break, I continue to evaluate data daily to make the safest decision possible for our students, staff, and families. We continue to see a steady increase in the total active cases across the county. This is a trend that's been consistent for more than 21 days in this latest surge. I do not have a crystal ball, but all indications are this current surge will continue throughout the holiday break and possibly well into next semester. Ideally, we would have all students on campus, receiving instruction 5 days per week, but we want to accomplish that thoughtfully and safely based on the most current data.

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Due to the sustained trends in new active cases as we go into the holiday, I am making the decision to begin the spring semester in the Distance/Remote Learning model for all students, starting January 6 through January 8. Beginning next semester in the Distance/Remote Learning model will allow time for those that may have been exposed during holiday celebrations to recover before returning to in-person school. Per our district reentry plan, we will make a decision on Wednesday, January 6, using the most current data available for the following two weeks of school (January 11 through January 22).

I realize this is an unusual start to the new semester, but I believe it's necessary to accomplish our goal of safely educating our students. Merry Christmas and I hope everyone has a safe and healthy holiday break.

In highest regard,

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