

# PALESTINE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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*"Palestine ISD... A World-Class Academic Organization"*

Jason Marshall  
Superintendent

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Friday, September 10, 2021

Wildcat Family,

We hope you are enjoying the new school year so far. As I travel our campuses, I see lots of smiling faces, and I know our students are taking their learning seriously each and every day. As we are well on our way to completing the first six weeks of school, I want to send you an update on several items:

Student Absences - Since the first day of school, we have closely monitored our daily attendance rate including the number of daily absences related to Covid-19. Over the last several weeks, we have had two-to-three times the number of absences as we typically do this time of the year. We hope you and your family are staying safe, and even though we want all of our students to come to school every day, please stay at home and take care of yourself if you are not feeling well.

Virtual Learning - We have had several requests from students and parents for students to be able to learn at home (similar to last year). Unfortunately, that's not a "choice option" for us at this time. The Texas Education Agency has put a 10% cap on the number of at-home learners we can have. And with our daily absence rate at 11% right now, we only have enough virtual learning space for those who are at home sick with Covid or who are being quarantined due to close Covid contact.

Facility Cleaning - We continue to clean each of our facilities every day. Additionally, we are spraying each of our facilities (including all student spaces) every night with a Covid-killing mixture. Our buses are being sprayed with the same mixture after both the morning and afternoon bus runs.

PPE - We continue to provide each of our campuses with appropriate Covid Personal Protection Equipment. Soap is available at all restroom locations, and numerous hand dispensers are available throughout our facilities. We are continuously adding additional soap dispensers as the need arises. We still have plenty of masks available for students and staff. Please don't hesitate to ask if you need a mask.

Covid Testing - We did apply for and have been awarded a bulk quantity of Covid tests by the Texas Education Agency. However, we have not received these tests to date as the supply chain is backed-up. Once delivered to us, we will get these to our campuses asap. If your child is involved in covid testing, you will certainly know about it.

I also want to make you aware of several adjustments we will be making next Monday (9/13/21):

1. We are going to do a little stronger "daily Covid check" of students beginning Monday. That doesn't mean that we are going to check everyone's temperature, but we are going to be a little more formal than we have been the first month of school. Please, please, please keep your student at home if they have any Covid-related symptoms.
2. We are still going to allow parents to come to school and see your student. We do ask, however, that you limit the number of persons in your group to two immediate family members.
3. As we have since the first day of school, we are allowing (and strongly encouraging) students to bring their own personal water bottle to school with them. Each of our campuses has designated water bottle filling stations as well as traditional water fountains. Beginning next week, we will only allow students to use water fountains to fill their water bottles. Teachers will have access to disposable cups for students who do not have a water bottle, but that access is not unlimited, so we need your help in providing your student something to drink out of.
4. We are not going to put a clear plastic divider on each desk at this time. However, students may ask for a divider, and we will provide it to them. The dividers will be disinfected each day.

And finally, I want to clarify a few rumors that you may have heard of over the last two weeks:

1. We are not implementing a mask mandate at this time. Currently, we have about 17% of our students and 24% of our staff members who are choosing to wear a mask. We certainly support them in their decision and are firmly committed to having a mask-friendly environment, but we are not requiring anyone to wear a mask. We are also not prohibiting anyone from wearing a mask. If you hear that from anyone, please call the campus principal.
2. We are not mandating or coercing anyone to get a Covid-vaccination. Just like masks, we support anyone who chooses to get a vaccination. We feel that is each individual's decision, and we are not "twisting anyone's arm" to take the vaccine. Additionally, we do not have Covid vaccine shots at school.
3. Even though we have a higher than normal rate of sickness (including Covid-19), we are not planning to close a campus or the district at this time. If our attendance rate gets lower and/or we don't have enough staff members (due to sickness) to have school, we will do our best to prepare you for that situation in time for you to make adjustments.

In closing, we continue to wish you well. We also send our sympathy and concerns to you if you or your family has been significantly impacted by Covid-19. And, as we have done since the inception of Covid 19, we encourage you to protect yourself and your family. Please take the appropriate measures to stay safe.

Sincerely,

Jason Marshall  
Superintendent  
Palestine ISD.