

Dr. Steve Gallon III, Vice Chair

Co-Sponsors: Ms. Perla Tabares Hantman, Chair
Ms. Lucia Baez-Geller
Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall
Ms. Maria Teresa Rojas
Ms. Luisa Santos

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SUBJECT: UPDATE OF COVID-19 RELATED PROCEDURES FOR IDENTIFICATION, NOTIFICATION, QUARANTINE, TESTING, FACIAL COVERINGS, AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS FOR THE 2021-2022 OPENING OF SCHOOLS

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COMMITTEE: PERSONNEL, STUDENT, SCHOOL & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN: SAFE, HEALTHY & SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) remains committed to the health, safety, and wellness of its employees, parents, community stakeholders, and most importantly its students. As the community, state, nation, and world continue to wrestle with the significant and adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, more specifically the Delta variant, school systems around the nation, including Miami-Dade, will continue to grapple with ensuring safe and healthy learning and working environments for its employees and students. In doing so, the identification, notification, quarantine and testing as they relate to COVID-19 must remain a fulcrum of M-DCPS's health and wellness strategy.

During the pandemic, the School Board approved Agenda Item H-3 (Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) COVID-19 Guidelines and Procedures Manual and COVID-19 Parent Handbook) at the meeting of November 18, 2020, proffered by School Board Member Ms. Mari Tere Rojas and co-sponsored by School Board Chair Ms. Perla Tabares Hantman; School Board Vice Chair Dr. Steve Gallon III; as well as School Board Members Ms. Lucia Baez-Geller, Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall, and Ms. Christi Fraga. At the same meeting, the School Board also approved Agenda Item H-7, proffered by Vice Chair Dr. Steve Gallon III (Review of Covid-19 Related Procedures for Identification, Notification, Quarantine & Testing), and co-sponsored by Ms. Perla Tabares Hantman, Chair, as well as School Board Members Ms. Lucia Baez-Geller, Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall, Ms. Christi Fraga, and Ms. Maria Teresa Rojas. These items directed the Superintendent of Schools to review, update, and/or develop COVID-19 procedures related to the identification, notification, quarantine and testing for employees and students, and to develop and update the Parent Handbook in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole, in consultation with the County Council PTA/PTSA, and the Guide to the Reopening of Miami-Dade County Public Schools – Reopen Smart Return Safe.

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Subsequent to those items, the Superintendent met with public health officials and representatives of the County Council PTA/PTSA to develop recommendations and insights on the type of information that students, parents/guardians and community stakeholders would find helpful to incorporate in the COVID-19 Parent Handbook and the Guide to the Reopening of Miami-Dade County Public Schools, and the updates were provided in English, Spanish and Haitian Creole.

In anticipation of the return of students and employees to in-person learning for the 2021-2022 school year, M-DCPS, as well as districts throughout the state of Florida, are being faced with an unprecedented increase in COVID-19 cases among unvaccinated and even in rare instances the vaccinated. In fact, Florida reported 21,683 new COVID-19 cases as of July 30, 2021, the single-highest daily COVID-19 case count since the pandemic began 18 months ago, according to Center for Disease Control data. The seven-day moving average soared to 15,817 on July 30th, a more than 750% increase since July 1, 2021. The patients filling hospitals at an alarming rate are different than in the past. They have reported to be younger and healthier. In the overwhelming majority of cases, the patients are unvaccinated. This year, as the Delta variant of the virus rampages through the state, Florida hospitals have added more than 7,000 new COVID-19 patients in just 21 days. The state's hospitals are reaching their capacity. According to a spokesperson for the Agency for Health Care Administration, Florida, nearly 84% of the state's inpatient hospital beds were in use on July 30, 2021, and nearly 86% of its intensive care unit beds. COVID-19 patients made up about one-third of the people admitted to intensive care. Both inpatient and intensive care usage rates are approaching the state's overall pandemic peak from July 2020, leaving short-staffed hospitals scrambling. Hospitals throughout Florida are cancelling elective surgeries, and the emergency transport in some counties have intermittently exceeded their capacity.

Local and State officials have stressed the importance of the vaccine as a critical tool to fight the virus, but more residents need to get vaccinated. Vaccines have been widely available to Floridians as young as 12 for months. They have been proven, in the overwhelming majority of cases, to prevent a person from suffering the worst effects of the virus.

The return of students and employees to the schoolhouse model has unquestionably heightened a sense of alarm, anxiety, and urgency in schools throughout the District.

Despite the confirmed dedication and tireless efforts, M-DCPS is now faced with an increased obligation to review, clarify, and improve plans, processes, and procedures for COVID-19 identification, notification, quarantine, and testing across the District and amongst all stakeholders including employees, parents, community members, and most importantly students. Inasmuch as current efforts have advanced the M-DCPS efforts to provide for a safe and healthy return to high quality teaching and learning experiences, there can be no ambiguity around issues pertaining to COVID-19 identification, notification, quarantine, testing, vaccinations, and even decisions pertaining to school closures.

Moreover, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) have recently released updated guidance, recommending that all students over 2 years old, along with school staff, wear facial coverings indoors, regardless of whether they have been vaccinated against COVID-19. In the interest of student and employee safety, the wearing of facial coverings is strongly recommended during the school day and at school-related events. However, parents have a right to have their child attend public school without a facial covering. Such parental rights can be fully respected in a manner that promotes and protects schools from the spread of COVID-19. As such, any student not wearing a facial covering over the nose and mouth must, through his/her/their parent or guardian, complete the opt out procedures provided by his/her/their assigned school.

The need for students, employees and visitors to wear facial coverings inside school buildings should be revisited by the Superintendent every two weeks to determine if the approach should be revised in light of current community infection rates, hospitalizations, and other relevant factors as determined by local health officials, the CDC and the AAP. Should recommendations from the Florida Department of Education, Florida Department of Health, or other authoritative or controlling government health agencies, and/or the Miami-Dade County be revised, M-DCPS may revise their requirements related to the wearing of facial coverings to comply with their updated guidance. This item seeks to direct the Superintendent to update M-DCPS protocols, procedures, outreach efforts, administrative measures, notification, quarantine, and testing requirements, and provide those updates on the M-DCPS websites for all COVID-related information for the benefit of employees, parents, community stakeholders, and students. This item requests that a written update be provided to the School Board by August 19, 2021, and that a presentation regarding same be made at the September 1, 2021, Personnel, Student, School & Community Support Committee meeting.

This item has been reviewed by the School Board Attorney as to form and legal sufficiency.

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
DR. STEVE GALLON III:**

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, direct the Superintendent to:

1. update procedures for COVID-19 related identification, notification, quarantine, and testing and confirm the process for COVID-19 testing for employees that confirm current positive or negative status;
2. update the implementation of the Board policies granting the Superintendent the authority to control communicable diseases and the spread of COVID-19, by authorizing the Superintendent to explore the feasibility of requiring facial coverings for all students, employees, contractors and visitors while inside M-DCPS school buildings, except for students whose parents exercise their right to affirmatively elect not to have their child wear facial coverings in school;

3. explore the availability of cost neutral partnerships with entities, organizations, and/or municipalities for COVID-19 testing and vaccinations;
4. provide an updated communication plan and strategy for employees, parents, community stakeholders, and students regarding relevant and related COVID-19 procedures governing identification, notification, quarantine, testing and vaccinations;
5. update any criteria for determining the closure of individual schools for reasons related to COVID-19;
6. update procedures for contact tracing as appropriate;
7. update procedures and processes to monitor quarantined students pursuant to established CDC guidelines and/or requirements; and
8. provide an update to the Board on the above steps taken as well as any additional COVID-19 relevant information in (a) written update by August 19, 2021; (b) a presentation at the September 1, 2021, Personnel, Student, School & Community Support Committee meeting; (c) disseminate such presentation to employees, parents, community stakeholders, and students; and (d) ensure availability and access to such updates on the M-DCPS website.