

JOHNSON COUNTY
KANSAS
Health & Environment

April 29, 2021

Superintendents and School Boards,

Thank you for your continued partnership during this challenging year.

I am writing today to encourage you to continue requiring masks in schools and at school activities. The County's public health orders have changed, but the situation in schools has not: students younger than 16 years old are not yet eligible to be vaccinated and because we have students back fully in person, physical distancing of six feet is not possible. Students and staff spend hours a day in close proximity to one another, which creates environment conducive to viral transmission.

Masking is a critical element of student and staff safety under these conditions. Early this year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released the [Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools](#), which compiled scientific study and observation of different pandemic learning modes. The conclusion was that in-person education can be done safely, provided mitigation measures are in place. Paramount in these recommendations is this: "All schools should implement and layer prevention strategies and *should prioritize universal and correct use of masks* and physical distancing."

The Johnson County Department of Health and Environment's school guidelines also rely on masking as a critical safety measure. In cases where masks were universally and properly worn, we rarely recommended exclusion of exposed individuals. The consequences of people not masking could increase the number of students/staff contracting the virus and the number of people quarantining.

Let me again reiterate our commitment to working with you to ensure students can safely be in school. We value your partnership and remain a resource as you navigate the last weeks of this unprecedented school year. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Dr. Sanmi Areola
Director, Johnson County Department of Health and Environment