



**JOHNSON COUNTY**  
KANSAS

## Health & Environment

February 22, 2021

Superintendents,

Thank you for your continued partnership through these unprecedented times. The public health community recognizes the burden remote learning puts on families and the challenges students face learning at home. We are approaching one year since the pandemic interrupted the traditional learning model. In that time, we have seen that schools can safely educate children in-person, **provided they closely adhere to mitigation measures**, including masking, physical distancing, cohorting, hand washing, excluding ill and exposed persons, and monitoring for symptoms.

Cases of COVID-19 in Johnson County and across the country have been declining in recent weeks, and we are cautiously optimistic the trend will continue. Vaccine is being allocated to protect school personnel and we are working with you and Children's Mercy to ensure all educators will have had at least the first dose by April 1<sup>st</sup>.

**I am writing to express my support to reopen schools this spring.**

The CDC recently released its [Operational Strategy for Reopening Schools](#), which stressed the importance of children being in school under the right conditions. Among other mitigation measures, the CDC emphasized the need for universal and correct use of masks and physical distancing of at least six feet wherever possible. JCDHE recognizes the challenge this will pose for our schools and is supportive of design changes that allow schools to maintain high standards around mitigation efforts to keep students and staff safe.

JCDHE is committed to continuing to partner with districts and other school administrators. Public health and school staff will continue to contact trace and identify exposed individuals and recommend they be excluded from in-person activities. JCDHE will update our exclusion recommendations to reflect the new reality where more students are in smaller spaces, meaning that increased transmission is possible.

We need the community to do its part to stay safe and prioritize having students attend school in-person by avoiding close, unmasked contact with individuals outside their homes in social gatherings, sports, and other extra-curricular activities. Although cases are falling, now is not the time to let our guard down. If cases spike again or transmission in school settings becomes an issue, it may be necessary to go back to remote learning.

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JCDHE remains a resource for you as you make decisions about how and when to open schools to in-person instruction. We value your partnership and will continue to collaborate with you to design the next phase of learning for our students.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sanmi Areola". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "S".

Dr. Sanmi Areola  
Director, JCDHE