



ALACHUA COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
We are committed to the success of every student.

# Message from the Superintendent: Masking

August 4, 2021

Dear Alachua County Public School families and staff:

Just a few weeks ago, we were all planning for a more 'normal' start to the school year. Unfortunately COVID--particularly the more infectious and dangerous Delta variant--has changed those plans.

During last night's School Board meeting, several doctors and health experts representing UF Health, North Florida Regional Medical Center, the Alachua County Health Department, Alachua Fire Rescue and other organizations shared alarming news about COVID in our community. There's been a huge increase in cases and hospitalizations, including among previously healthy children. Intensive care units are reaching and sometimes exceeding capacity. At times, the county has run short on ambulances because of the spike in COVID cases, which has increased response times.

ACPS is experiencing this spike first-hand. Over the weekend two of our employees passed away from COVID. The number of employees testing positive for COVID has jumped in the past two weeks, even before most of them are back from summer break. We've had 18 new cases in the last three days alone. More than 80 employees are now in quarantine, and that number is rising fast. Many of them have symptoms and are waiting for test results.

We want our schools to be open, because we know that's best for children. But if this trend continues, we may not have enough people to operate our schools safely.

For these reasons, the School Board has decided to require masks for students for the first two weeks of the school year. At its August 17 meeting, the Board will reevaluate that policy.

The district had already taken the step of requiring all employees, vendors, and visitors to our schools and facilities to wear masks starting immediately and running through at least September 17. That would include Meet Your Teacher/orientation sessions later this week.

In keeping with our [Face Coverings Policy](#), families may request that their child opt out of wearing a mask by submitting a [form signed by a doctor](#). Schools will also continue to provide mask breaks throughout the day.

Our goal is to keep schools open, protect our students, staff and families and help this community avoid an even bigger health crisis. We certainly don't want to make it harder for

the citizens of Alachua County to get the emergency and medical care they need by adding to the spread of COVID.

With your support, we can help bring this virus under control and look forward to a return to normal sooner rather than later. More importantly, we can help prevent more needless illness and deaths.

Sincerely,

Carlee Simon, Ph.D.

Superintendent

Alachua County Public Schools



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620 E. University Avenue  
Gainesville, FL 32601

352-955-7300

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