

August 16, 2021

COVID-19 UPDATE

Dear HFAA Families,

Last year, Harding saw several cases of Covid-19; however, we had no confirmed transmissions on campus. I am confident that this was in part due to careful planning and universal mask-wearing. Like my counterparts in education, I have thoughtfully weighed the options available (requiring mask or not). I cannot escape the reality of the new delta variant or the climbing infections rates, so clearly now is not the time to let down our guard.

Beginning Wednesday, August 18, masks will be required for all students and staff while on school grounds and at school-related activities when in close contact (6 feet or less), regardless of vaccination status. Masks will also be enforced at all times for visitors.

The two most important actions we can take to protect ourselves and others from falling prey to this potentially deadly virus are universal mask-wearing and vaccination. As we work through this phase of the pandemic, we need to both protect community health as well as preserve our ability to keep students in person full time. My commitment to you is that we will do everything in our power to safeguard both, but we need your help fulfilling our duty to protect everyone in our care.

As parents, you trust us to make daily choices in the best interest of your child. In life, the right choice is not always easy or comfortable, but we know our first responsibility is to provide a safe and healthy environment to learn. For now, at HFAA this needs to include wearing masks to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 and the damaging effects of students being forced into distance learning.

I have great appreciation for, and confidence in the compassion, strength, and resilience of the HFAA community. The following are adjustments and reminders of how we can all support keeping our school doors open.



Masks & Social Distancing:

Per CDC guidelines, beginning Wednesday, August 18.

Masks are required for all students, staff, and visitors while on school grounds and at school-related activities when in close contact (6 feet or less), regardless of vaccination status.

Our goal to protect the health and safety of our community is greatly enhanced by following proven strategies that reduce transmission of the virus. CDC guidelines, including the universal proper wearing of an appropriate mask, provide evidence-based ways for us to slow the spread of Covid-19 and its variants.

- This will be strictly enforced at all times, including passing periods.
- HFAA will provide a mask to any student, staff member, or visitor who presents without one.
- Mask exemption request forms for parents to opt out are available online or in the main office.
 - → www.hardingfinearts.org/covid



Isolation/Quarantining:

As always, if a student or staff member has been exposed to another individual with a confirmed case of Covid-19, the exact circumstances surrounding suspected exposure will be considered, contact tracing with OCCHD will commence, and appropriate quarantining procedures will be followed per CDC/OCCHD guidelines.

We are examining options that might permit us to limit quarantining for students and staff who may have been exposed and are already fully vaccinated, but we have not yet determined that we can/should change from the process we have been followed.



Vaccination:

Please get vaccinated if you are eligible. Vaccination is highly effective in preventing infection, but just as important, it is highly effective in preventing serious illness and death.

Each of us must do our part to protect one another from this deadly virus. I am asking the HFAA community to support our efforts in protecting everyone to the very best of our ability. If we do not each do our part now, we increase the risk of prolonging the pandemic and jeopardize the ability for school to remain open. Knowing we share these responsibilities, we must work together.

In a digital age, information is coming to us at a record pace, and it can be difficult to sift through differing ideas and opinions. However, I am troubled that somehow in our society the simple preventative act of wearing a mask became politicized. Public health, especially when protecting our children, is not a political issue. You have my commitment that our decisions will be based on CDC guidelines and the evidence-based science that supports those recommendations.

We don't live in a bubble, and as a community the actions we take individually and as a school have a very real impact on those around us, particularly concerning our immunocompromised students, faculty, and families. In the years to come when we reflect on the decisions we made, we will likely never be able to discern if we were overly cautious, but we will certainly know if we didn't do enough.

Finally, we highly value parent voice and choice, and it is essential that we continually provide opportunities for input, feedback, and adaptation. HFAA's online [Covid-19 Plan Feedback Form](#) is a valuable tool and available to all of our HFAA community.

Thank you in advance for supporting our efforts to protect our students and keep them on campus.

Sincerely and respectfully,

Barry Schmelzenbach
Superintendent

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WWW.HARDINGFINEARTS.ORG/COVID