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Date: Sept. 10, 2021

To: Families of Santa Cruz County

Re: COVID-19 response updates, testing FAQ

Dear Families of Santa Cruz County,

Thank you for your resilience and unwavering dedication to the success of our students during a time of continued challenge and uncertainty. Despite high rates of COVID-19 transmission in our wider community, we have yet to close a single classroom across Santa Cruz County this fall — a sign of success for which all students, parents, and staff members share credit.

Public health officials are sharing more optimistic news about the course of COVID-19 within our wider community. The reproductive rate of the disease (i.e, the R-Naught) has fallen below 1, meaning case numbers are trending downward within the community. This is a promising sign that we may be on the descent from delta-variant driven surge. While this news buoys our spirits, it must not cause us to lower our vigilance.

As we have previously shared, the availability of COVID-19 tests for the entire school community has significantly expanded in recent weeks — and more is yet to come. This is possible through close collaboration between all of our districts and a key partnership with Inspire Diagnostics, the private provider we are working with to perform the testing. Here is the latest on the status of our major testing initiatives:

- **Weekly on-site PCR testing:** Most schools in our county will be offering PCR testing on-site to all students who opt-in in accordance with guidance from the California Department of Public Health. In cases where students may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, the testing is offered twice weekly. In the weeks ahead, we are working to expand on-site testing to the overwhelming majority of public, private and charter schools countywide. We have created a frequently asked questions (FAQ) document to provide more clarity about the program.
- **Drive-through PCR testing:** Two outdoor drive-through PCR testing sites are now open to the entire school community. These sites are available for symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals, and most test results are returned within 24-hours — comparatively, faster than most alternatives. The first site is located at **Cabrillo College in Aptos**, Parking Lot K, from **3 p.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Friday** and **9 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday**. The second location is at **PVUSD District**

Office parking lot, available from **9 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays, Wednesday, and Fridays**. Students and their families, and staff and their families are welcome to utilize this free service. Those needing a test simply need to fill out the registration one time at <http://sccoe.link/inspiresc> and go to either site. No appointment is required.

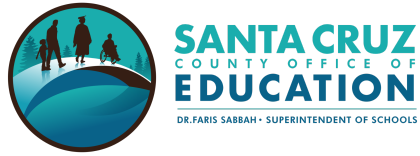
- **Rapid-response antigen testing:** Hundreds of school staff from across the county have been trained to administer rapid-response antigen testing to provide an additional layer of surveillance in cases of on-campus exposure.
- **Student vaccine clinics:** Additional student vaccine clinics are scheduled **11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 12, at San Lorenzo Valley Elementary School and Pajaro Valley High School**. Pre-registration and consent can be completed at sccoe.link/studentvax. Walk-ins are also welcome.

Understandably, many families have questions about the various testing initiatives, and we have attached a FAQ document addressing most common questions. A virtual town hall meeting took place yesterday evening, during which questions were answered and further updates on our COVID-19 response were shared. A recording of the town hall will be made available on the [COE YouTube channel](#) for those unable to attend, and we anticipate hosting additional town halls in the weeks ahead.

The level of inter-district coordination involved in these initiatives is difficult to overstate, and we understand to be unusual in our state, even under the current circumstances. Inspire Diagnostics, our primary testing partner, has our gratitude for enabling this level of testing in our schools. And above all else, our persistent focus on increasing testing capacity across Santa Cruz County reflects our foundational commitment: ensuring our students are healthy, and our classrooms are open.

Yours in education and equity,

Eric Gross, Superintendent, Pacific Elementary School District
Mike Heffner, Superintendent, Bonny Doon Union Elementary School District
Tanya Krause, Superintendent, Scotts Valley Unified School District
Daisy Morales, Superintendent, Live Oak School District
Kris Munro, Superintendent, Santa Cruz City Schools
Faris Sabbah, County Superintendent of Schools
Chris Schiermeyer, Superintendent, San Lorenzo Valley Unified School District
Jen Ra'anan, Principal/CEO, Delta Charter High School
Josh Ripp, Head of School, Ceiba College Prep
Michelle Stewart, Superintendent, Happy Valley Elementary School District
Megan Tresham, Superintendent, Mountain Elementary School District
Scott Turnbull, Superintendent, Soquel Union Elementary School District



FAQs on the Weekly PCR Testing Program

Schools and Districts are working to keep students and staff safe and our classrooms open. Testing is one layer in a multi-layered approach to COVID-19 prevention, in addition to other key measures such as vaccination, mask-wearing, improved ventilation, physical distancing, and respiratory and hand hygiene. We are partnering with Inspire Diagnostics to conduct school-based weekly testing using the PCR test. This testing is optional for students. Students who participate will be eligible for [Modified Quarantine](#) if they are exposed to a positive case at school. This will allow them to stay in school during the quarantine period.

1. Why are we providing optional weekly testing for students?

Screening testing is part of a comprehensive strategy that includes masking indoors, vaccination, isolation/quarantine protocols, keeping students home when they are ill and more. CDPH recommends screening with a molecular test with a weekly frequency. They assert that molecular testing as a screening tool is most effective when turnaround times are short (<2 days)." With Inspire Diagnostics, turnaround times are 24 hours.

2. Is the Weekly PCR testing initiative being mandated for students?

No, the PCR testing effort requires consent and is voluntary.

3. Can students consent to participate in the weekly PCR testing program?

In [accordance with CDPH](#), students, who are age 13 and up, can consent to be tested. Schools will be notifying all parents of the program and request their consent.

4. What does the program look like for students?

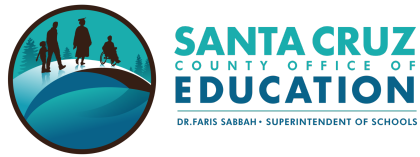
All students who have a consent form completed will be tested during school hours, on campus. The trained Inspire healthcare worker uses a swab to collect respiratory material found in the lower nasal. A swab is a soft tip on a flexible stick that goes into the lower part of a student's nasal passage. The entire collection process should take only a few minutes. After collection, the swab is sealed in a tube and then sent to a laboratory for analysis.

5. How will I know the result of the PCR?

Parents will be notified within 24 hours of the sample being taken, via text and email.

6. Who can participate in Modified Quarantine?

For students to participate in Modified Quarantine, exposure needs to have occurred in a school setting and both individuals need to be masked. Vaccinated students do not need to quarantine if exposed.



7. What happens if a student does not participate in the weekly testing initiative?
Unvaccinated students who are exposed and don't qualify for Modified Quarantine or choose not to participate in testing would have to quarantine at home for 10 days.

8. How often will students be tested?

All students who have a consent completed will be tested once a week. Students who are exposed to a positive case will be tested a second time that week.

9. Are the CDC or FDA phasing out the PCR tests?

The CDC recently issued a [Lab Alert: Changes to CDC RT-PCR for SARS-CoV-2 Testing](#) to communicate a transition to new tests. The CDC is withdrawing the Emergency Use Authorization by Dec 31, 2021 to transition to the use of a new "multiplexed method" test they have developed. This new test not only searches for SARS-CoV-2 (as the PCR currently does) but also searches for the influenza virus, so that a separate test for influenza is not needed to be administered, saving time and money. One misunderstanding is that PCR tests are unable to differentiate between influenza and SARS-CoV-2; [this is not accurate](#).

10. Is the PCR test effective?

[According to the FDA](#) and to the [CDC](#), the PCR is a NAAT (Nucleic Acid Amplification Test) that continues to be the "gold standard" for identifying SARS-CoV-2. We will transition to using newer tests once they are approved by CDPH.

11. Should vaccinated individuals also participate in the weekly PCR Program?

We recommend all individuals participate in the program, especially if they have been exposed to a positive case. We are seeing positive cases among vaccinated individuals, who may be contagious.