



San Diego Community College District
Office of the Chancellor

September 16, 2021

CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19: UPDATE #25

To: SDCCD Colleagues and Friends

From: Carlos O. Turner Cortez, Chancellor

The Board of Trustees and I appreciate everyone's efforts to get the fall semester off to a good start as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. Your persistence on behalf of our students is inspiring.

Our goal throughout this year has been a safe reopening of our colleges in the spring 2022 semester. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve and present new challenges to meeting that goal and we remain committed to meeting those challenges in support of our students and communities.

A clear takeaway from the COVID-19 pandemic is the wide recognition of how critical education is for our society and communities. The multiple acts by federal and state legislators to provide emergency financial resources, access to medical services, and protective equipment and supplies to public education institutions and students demonstrates the value we place on the services we provide. As COVID-19 vaccines became available in the early spring, educators and staff were given priority access in a national effort to reopen schools, colleges, and universities.

The early optimism we felt as vaccination rates increased and infections decreased in the late spring and early summer has given way to uncertainty and doubt. The politicization of vaccines, inconsistent public health protective measures, and the more transmissible Delta variant have combined to delay our phased-in reopening.

Reopening for in-person instruction and services is essential for many of our students, especially those from communities with limited resources to participate effectively in distance education and online services. Researchers across the country are consistently reporting significant declines in college enrollment during the pandemic, with communities of color most impacted. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center estimates enrollments at community colleges are down nearly 10% nationwide, with enrollment of students identifying as Latinx down more than 18%.

There is reason for renewed hope. State and County data are showing the rapid rise in

COVID-19 cases in San Diego County throughout July and August has levelled off and is now in decline. Over the prior week (September 5 – 11) there were 32% fewer COVID-19 cases in San Diego County than the week of August 22 – 28. The rate of new cases per 100,000 residents is 23.1 as of September 15th, back down to levels observed before the holiday season last year and in mid-spring this year. Vaccination rates in the county continue to increase, as of September 8, 77.5% of the county's 2.8 million eligible residents had received at least one vaccination dose. The Human Resources Department is posting weekly data updates on COVID-19 cases within our District, county, and state you can find on our employee COVID resources webpage: <https://www.sdccd.edu/about/departments-and-offices/human-resources/risk-management/covid-employees.aspx>

The significance of vaccination in containing and ending the COVID-19 pandemic is overwhelming. In our region, since July 1st, individuals who are not vaccinated have been four to six times more likely to get COVID-19 and 50 to 55 times more likely to suffer severe illness. Booster doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are expected to be available during the fall to increase immunity, further underscoring the vital role vaccination will serve in protecting ourselves against illness from COVID-19.

Within our District, more than 2,700 employees have submitted documentation of full vaccination, but nearly 1,450 have not responded to requests for vaccination status at this time. This level of uncertainty in the rate of vaccination across our workforce makes it very difficult to define and plan for the health and safety protocols necessary to offer more in-person instruction and services to our students and communities in the spring.

COVID-19 VACCINATION REQUIREMENT UPDATE

In May, Chancellor Emeritus Carroll announced the District would require vaccination for employees and students once the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) had fully approved one or more COVID-19 vaccines. As vaccination rates increased and case rates in our region declined into the early summer, we were hopeful imposing this requirement on employees would not be necessary. We resumed limited in-person instruction this semester with a vaccination requirement for students, while allowing many employees to return to in-person work without being vaccinated.

Given the considerable difference in COVID-19 infection rates for vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals, our ability to proceed with a safe reopening is dependent on having as many people as possible vaccinated. Accordingly, the Board of Trustees will be presented with a declaration at its meeting on September 23 that will direct the District to impose a COVID-19 vaccination requirement for all employees and for students enrolled in onsite classes and activities. With this direction from the Board, the District will consult with the appropriate bargaining unit representatives and participatory governance committees to develop and implement this requirement.

Further details will be provided by the Vice Chancellor of Human Resources, including timelines for employees to get vaccinated, procedures for submitting vaccination information, and processes for requesting an exemption based on medical need or religious beliefs.

FALL SEMESTER OPERATIONS

The fall is a critical time for developing plans for the spring, engaging with prospective students ready to begin or resume their educational pursuits, and redefining how we meet

our communities' needs going forward from the COVID-19 pandemic.

As I previously announced, we have paused our return to onsite work timeline at two days onsite per week for many positions as an added safety measure given the current COVID-19 case rates in the county. There has been much speculation around the impact of the Labor Day holiday and full return of K-12 education on COVID-19 case rates. Beginning September 20, we will be able to see whether another rapid increase in infections is occurring. If the data show case rates are continuing to decline, we will likely be able to resume our return to onsite work timeline safely and increase our onsite work days. If case rates are increasing, we will reassess our current status.

SPRING SEMESTER PLANNING

The District will not establish an expected minimum percentage of in-person instruction for the spring semester. Each college will work through its established policies, procedures, and processes to determine in-person, hybrid, and distance education assignments and onsite and remote work assignments. The framework for these decisions will be four primary pillars:

1. Providing safe, healthy educational and working environments
2. Working within our collective bargaining agreement provisions and policies
3. Meeting the diverse needs and interests of our students
4. Maintaining flexibility in our planning so we can adjust if necessary

We have extended the timeframes for each college to develop and finalize its instructional schedule for the spring semester to provide as much time as possible for everyone to engage in planning, assess evolving public health conditions, and get input from students. While extending the time to develop the schedule is necessary, we must also act with urgency to give students sufficient time to register, apply for financial aid, enroll in classes, and prepare for the spring semester. We are grateful for everyone involved in supporting students through these processes and adapting to provide services through multiple modalities.

For non-instructional Faculty, Classified Professionals, Supervisors, and Managers, the spring semester will be an opportunity to fully reengage in onsite work and activities, while helping the District redefine the way we engage, support, and educate students. Working through the appropriate collective bargaining and participatory governance processes during the fall, we are working to develop new policies and procedures to expand workplace flexibilities that support diverse service modalities for students and work-life balance for employees. Our goal is to begin offering more work location flexibility in the spring semester.

IN CONCLUSION

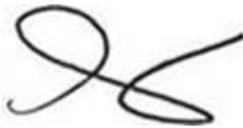
As difficult as it was to make the sudden transition to distance education and remote work at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, in many ways returning is more complicated. Public health officials increasingly agree novel coronaviruses will likely be part of our reality for many years to come, with new variants emerging every year similar to the flu. However, with vaccines and medicines protecting us from severe illness, we will not need to live in fear.

We have learned many important lessons about how we can enhance our services through technology, a mixture of in-person and online programs, and more workplace flexibilities. Your engagement in defining how we emerge from COVID-19 is critical. We have heard

clearly how important timely communication is to working through these transitional phases successfully and we will continue to create more opportunities for discussion, input, and sharing. The Return to Onsite Activities Workgroup, with representatives from the Academic and Classified Senates, AFT Guild, and Chancellor's Cabinet is resuming meetings and the District Governance Committee meetings will continue to include time for input and feedback from representatives. I encourage everyone to work with leaders, supervisors, and managers in their area to provide input and feedback on how we can continue to advance our goals of providing safe, inclusive, and equitable educational and work environments for everyone.

I look forward to your continued comments and feedback.

Sincerely,



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