



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION  
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

July 6, 2021

Dear Colleagues:

Thank you for all you have done for students this past year. You have worked incredibly hard to get schools reopened, meet students' needs, and address the impacts of COVID-19 on your school communities. Your efforts have not gone unnoticed, and I am honored every day to serve our country with you. Today, I write to ask for your assistance with vaccinations, screening testing, and summer learning and enrichment opportunities.

We have made tremendous progress in the past few months, but we still have work to do to ensure that every student has the opportunity and confidence to return to the classroom this fall and start making up for lost instructional and extracurricular time this summer. We need your help more than ever to make in-person learning five days a week a reality this fall, and what you do over the coming weeks and months will truly make a difference.

Both vaccination and testing are critical factors in the Administration's goal to safely reopen all of America's schools and offer five days of in-person instruction to all families each week.

I urge you to do all you can to help students age 12 and up, their families, and all school staff with getting vaccinated. COVID-19 vaccines are the most effective strategy we have to protect people from getting sick and to reduce the risk of people spreading COVID-19. It is up to all of us to protect the members of our school communities from the harms of COVID-19, and vaccinations are the most important safety measure we can take.

To boost the vaccination rates in your school community, I ask you to take the following steps:

- First, for our superintendents, if you have not already, **stand up a vaccination clinic at your school sites, and for state officials, please support your districts with this critical work.** Enclosed with this letter is a Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) toolkit ([https://wecandothis.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2021-06/\(508%20Compliant\)On-Site%20Vaccination%20Clinic%20Toolkit.pdf](https://wecandothis.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2021-06/(508%20Compliant)On-Site%20Vaccination%20Clinic%20Toolkit.pdf)), developed in consultation with the White House, with recommendations on how to effectively work with your local health partners to stand up a vaccine clinic for your staff and eligible students and their families as soon as possible. To learn more about the Health Center Program, visit: <https://bphc.hrsa.gov/about/>.
- **Second, launch a campaign to encourage eligible students, parents, and staff to get vaccinated and share with them the safety and effectiveness of vaccines and why they are critical to protecting individuals from COVID-19 and lowering community transmission.** Share this information with limited English proficient parents and students by providing it in their primary languages. Many families see their teachers and school administrators as some of the most trusted figures in their communities—your culturally responsive, accessible guidance and encouragement will be critical. We encourage you to

use your voice and your platforms to encourage students and parents to get vaccinated, and to organize events in your community this summer and in the lead up to school reopening focused on vaccination and reopening. You can partner with community- or faith-based organizations, labor, and others to get students and/families out to get vaccinated. You can also collaborate with student leaders to make efforts fun and get young people to participate.

- As part of these efforts, we encourage you also to **consider implementing creative incentives and initiatives to boost excitement and vaccine participation and use these opportunities to partner with local community-based programs, including early childhood education providers.** For example, Ohio has created in-state scholarship lotteries for students who get vaccinated; in Los Angeles, secondary schools that exceed a 30% vaccination rate will receive \$5,000 grants, and Head Start programs have partnered with a school district and local hospital to host vaccination satellite sites; and teens in Detroit are leading virtual sessions for their classmates encouraging them to sign up for vaccines. These are just some of the creative approaches states and districts are taking all over the country to boost vaccination rates, and I ask you to please as appropriate, consider similar activities.

Providing incentives to students and their household members to get vaccinated against COVID-19 is an allowable use of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) and Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Funds. Accelerating vaccination is a core component of our national strategy to defeat the virus, and it is a key strategy in alignment with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance as a way to increase safety and reduce risk of transmission in communities. Increasing vaccination rates in the community will help to bolster public health and reduce the risk of transmission and serious disease among students and staff.

For more information about uses of ESSER and GEER Funds, as well as the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) and the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, to support vaccinations and COVID-19 testing for teachers, faculty, staff, and eligible students, please see the enclosed document that provides answers to the most frequently asked questions.

Another important component of creating safe school environments is COVID-19 screening testing. HHS awarded funding from the American Rescue Plan to each of your states to support COVID-19 testing in schools. I urge you to engage with your state and local public health agencies to immediately deploy funds and launch screening testing programs (visit <https://www.cdc.gov/ncezid/dpei/pdf/guidance-elc-reopening-schools-508.pdf> for more information on how to set up a screening testing program for a school) that will allow you to safely reopen and operate school buildings in every district by the fall. COVID-19 screening testing is a reliable and effective method for containing the spread of the virus in school facilities.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, I've heard from parents and families across the country that they have felt significantly more comfortable returning their students to classrooms where a comprehensive screening testing program is in place. That's why CDC funding covers more than just testing

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html>

supplies—it can be used to fund costs associated with launching, staffing, and implementing a screening testing program. Further, our experts at CDC are working in partnership with state and local health agencies to offer any assistance you might need. I strongly encourage you to take advantage of this landmark funding to protect your school communities through robust COVID-19 screening testing.

Finally, I want to emphasize the importance of using this summer as a long entry ramp to the fall. As you know, some students and teachers have not been in classrooms since March 2020. With summer learning and enrichment opportunities, students can re-connect with peers and staff before returning to in-person schooling in the fall. We can meet students where they are and help address their social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs, to set them up for success. Reaching out to families to encourage participation, training staff in best tactics to support student social emotional needs, implementing best safety practices, and creating a climate of fun and excitement about returning to in-person learning are all best practices to be implemented this summer. We also encourage you to work with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Health Resources and Services Administration-supported health centers and other health care providers to ensure students have the opportunity to catch up on routine immunizations prior to returning to the classroom.

Thanks again for your dedication to students and your communities. We need your engagement in the vaccination conversation. Tell us why vaccination is important to you using the hashtag #wecandothis. We have so many resources available on vaccination – especially for engaging parents and adolescents – available on the We Can Do This website, which we encourage you to visit and use: <https://wecandothis.hhs.gov/>.

I know that, if we work as a team, we can do this!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Miguel A. Cardona". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.

Enclosures