COVID-19 and Schools Fact Sheet: The Top Facts Every School District Employee Needs to Know
(source: The ABC Science Collaborative; April 2021)

Fact #1: Strict adherence to the “3Ws” (wear mask, wash hands, wait 6 feet apart) will greatly mitigate secondary spread of the Coronavirus.

- **Supporting statement:** This has been shown in school districts educating hundreds of thousands of students throughout the state. This ‘safe-school’ experience has been shown in school districts that are small (<5,000 students e.g., Mt Airy), mid-sized (5,000-15,000 e.g., Yadkin), and large (>15,000 e.g., Iredell-Statesville and Gaston). In addition, this has been shown in schools educating millions of children worldwide including Australia, Asia, and Europe.
- **Supporting statement:** Failure to adhere to masking, outside of rare exceptions, could lead to an unsafe work environment and promote irresponsible and unacceptable behavior.

Fact #2: If cloth masks and surgical masks that fit over the nose/mouth/chin are used, then distant transmission will be entirely avoided or a rare event.

- **Supporting statement:** To date, in the public-school setting, early data strongly supports that transmission will be avoided provided that masking is enforced as evidenced in schools with at least 99% mask enforcement.

Fact #3: Per the CDC, transmission beyond 6’ is possible—likely scenarios where this might occur include singing, aerosolizing medical procedures, and high intensity exercise without a mask.

- **Supporting statement:** If masking (cloth masks and surgical masks that fit over the nose/mouth/chin) is strictly enforced and high-risk activities are avoided, airborne transmission can be interrupted as evidenced by data from hundreds of hospital systems managing thousands of patients and from other school districts across the nation. Early data strongly support that COVID-19 transmission will be avoided provided that masking is enforced in the public-school setting.

Fact #4: N95 Masks are not necessary in the typical public school and district worksite settings.

- **Supporting statement:** Successful school districts are not using N95 masks. In addition, hospitals and clinics provide strong supporting evidence to support this statement. The following circumstances are similar between private clinics, free clinics, health department clinics, and schools:
  1. Employees and children are asymptomatic (this will be provided by attestation in schools and local clinics require the same attestations) and provide routine medical care to patients
  2. Children wear a cloth mask
  3. Employees wear a medical or cloth mask

*Under these circumstances, COVID-19 transmission has been limited primarily to breaks in mask protocol.*
Fact #5: Whether the percent of positive cases (one of the 4 metrics the district is monitoring) is above or below 5%, assume that there will always be infected people in every school and work site every day.

- Supporting statement: Regardless of the number of people infected per day in the county, school policies should assume that there will always be infected people in every building throughout the 2020-2021 school year. This is a hallmark of infection control.

Fact #6: HEPA filters and ventilation have not been shown to reduce or eliminate transmission of SARS-CoV-2. Even in the setting of poor ventilation, masking is demonstrated to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

- Supporting statement: HEPA filters and ventilation can reduce the burden of pathogens in the air but masking is much more important in reducing pathogens and preventing transmission, and can be effective even under circumstances of limited ventilation.

Fact #7: Time spent in large or small groups in enclosed spaces should be minimized without masks or when compliance to mask wearing is less than 100% or cannot be ensured.

- Supporting statement: There is a higher risk of transmission when people are unmasked.

Fact #8: Success is possible!

- Supporting statement: In districts that adhere to masking, clusters (5 or more cases at a school) are infrequent. Supporting Pediatrics publication cited below:

  Incidence and Secondary Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 Infections in Schools

Fact #9: Secondary transmission is limited in districts that mask.

- Supporting statement: See Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) articles cited below:

  COVID-19 Cases and Transmission in 17 K–12 Schools — Wood County, Wisconsin, August 31–November 29, 2020

  Pilot Investigation of SARS-CoV-2 Secondary Transmission in Kindergarten Through Grade 12 Schools Implementing Mitigation Strategies — St. Louis County and City of Springfield, Missouri, December 2020

  Low SARS-CoV-2 Transmission in Elementary Schools — Salt Lake County, Utah, December 3, 2020–January 31, 2021

  Estimated SARS-CoV-2 Seroprevalence Among Persons Aged <18 Years — Mississippi, May–September 2020