

The Tishomingo County School District will open its doors for the 2021-2022 school year in the midst of rising COVID-19 delta variant cases, a situation in which the district is familiar with the effect COVID had on last school year. As school begins this week, the district is working to make families more familiar with measures being taken for staff and student safety as well as policy and guidance concerning COVID this year. Just like last year, each school is ready with plenty of hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies for hallways, bathrooms, buses, gyms, and classrooms. "We just received over 6,400 gallons of hand sanitizer from MEMA this week, and actually had a pretty large supply left from last year," stated superintendent Christie Holly. "We also have wipes, disinfectants, electrostatic foggers, PPE supplies, and other cleaning supplies for each school and classroom. We made these items top priority with our ESSER funding plan, and consider them our first line of defense for staff and student safety," Holly explained. "We have also received generous donations from some of our community members and parents who simply just want to help. They have had extra PPE or hand sanitizer on hand and have been so generous to want to donate that to our schools. We should have plenty of supplies due to the MEMA shipment, ESSER purchases, and donations."

Another ESSER purchase that occurred during the school year last year was the installation of touchless water faucets in each K-4 building in the district as well as hot water heaters. "We talked to medical personnel regarding the use of hot water to assist with younger students in hand washing effectiveness as it relates to killing viruses. While hot water is not necessary, proper hand washing for 20 seconds is necessary. So we felt adding the hot water with our K-4 students would encourage them to wash longer to meet that 20 second goal," explained Holly. "We are looking to install touchless toilet flush kits district-wide with ESSER funds as well, to not only help with the health of our staff and students, but to also assist in water conservation." Other plans for ESSER funds include upgrades to many of the district's aging HVAC systems in an effort to improve the air quality in school buildings and gyms, after-school programs, kindergarten assistants, tutors during the school day, and some additional technology needs with projectors, speakers, and device refresh purchases over the next three years.

While plans have been made all summer to return to more normalcy, the COVID-19 delta variant still needs to be taken seriously. The Mississippi State Department of Health has recommended in its latest guidance (issued on July 30th) that all individuals, vaccinated and unvaccinated, should wear masks while indoors. At this time, that will be the parents' decision for their children in the district. "We encourage parents to do what they feel is best for their children when it comes to their health and protection as it pertains to wearing a mask. While masking is recommended, it is not required at this time. The CDC and MSDH have stated that if both a COVID-positive person and a person deemed a close contact to that positive person are wearing masks, and the individuals are at least 3 feet apart, the close contact would not have to be quarantined. The guidance also states that vaccinated students and staff do not have to quarantine if exposed, but should monitor for symptoms. All of the new guidelines and protocols are on our district website, and we will communicate to parents if anything changes," explained Holly. "We are going to continue to clean, to wash hands, to teach proper hygiene, to encourage social distancing, and to protect our staff and students as best we can."