



## VIDEO TRANSCRIPT: Minnesota's New Education Commissioner

Hi, I'm your new Education Commissioner Heather Mueller.

First, I want to thank Governor Tim Walz and Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan for allowing me the opportunity to lead the Minnesota Department of Education at this critical point in time.

Since I was born, education has been an important part of my life. My parents taught at the community college in my hometown of Yuma, Arizona, and they supported me when I told them I wanted to follow in their footsteps and study to become an educator at Mankato State University.

Since the day I stepped off the plane in Minnesota, I have known this would become my adopted home. Minnesota is where I advanced my education and became a teacher, wife and mother.

Over the past year, I have worked hand in hand with Minnesota's schools, educators, families and students as we responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. I have seen and experienced the challenges facing our education system this year with all of you. Through it all, the resilience of Minnesotans has shown through.

I am incredibly proud of each and every member of our school community who have continued to put in the time and effort to ensure every student has opportunity and access to their education. I am especially proud of our students who have adapted to, and in many cases, overcome the challenges they have been presented this year.

As more Minnesotans receive their vaccine, I, like Governor Walz - am cautiously optimistic that we are turning a corner. While we will still need to take precautions due to the continued community spread of COVID-19, the Minnesota Department of Health has provided guidance on how we can keep our school communities healthy.

In addition to the basics of cleaning, handwashing and physical distancing, we also know that wearing masks and face shields can reduce the spread in school settings. And by providing free COVID-19 testing for all Minnesotans, students and school staff can get tested regularly to stop an outbreak before it happens – especially with the rise of the variant in our communities. Governor Walz has also prioritized school staff and childcare workers for the COVID-19 vaccine.

Right now - ALL Minnesota schools have the option of providing in-person learning to their students as long as they take additional steps to keep their communities healthy. We know every school has unique needs, challenges and opportunities. As a result, all school districts and charter schools have a locally created, personalized plan to keep educators, staff, students and families safe while providing hybrid or in-person learning.

While each plan may look a little different, schools providing in-person learning must:

- Keep students in small groups that stay together as much as possible during the school day.
- Require students and staff to wear masks.
- Provide all school staff with masks and face shields.
- Prioritize school staff for COVID-19 testing every other week.
- Clean the building daily and frequently clean high-touch surfaces throughout the day.
- Limit non-essential visitors, including volunteers.
- Monitor staff and students for illness.
- Send staff and students home when they are showing symptoms of COVID-19.

Schools are expected to communicate their plans directly to their staff, families and students in written and oral languages based on the needs of their community.

If you want to learn more about Minnesota's Safe Learning Plan, please go to [education.mn.gov](https://education.mn.gov).

Thank you, Minnesota for your patience, adaptability and commitment to education. I look forward to working in partnership with you as your Education Commissioner.

Together, we can ensure that our students, each and every one, has access, participates, is represented, is valued, seen and heard, and has options in their lives regardless of race or zip code.