

August 12, 2021

Vanguard Community,

As you are aware, COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths continue to rise in Arkansas, exceeding peaks experienced previously during this pandemic. To safeguard in-person learning and to protect the members of the Vanguard Community, facemasks are required in all indoor facilities on all ASU-Beebe campuses effective Friday, August 13, 2021. Exceptions are outlined in our protocols for personal office space, personal residence hall rooms, and for certain exceptions for faculty while they are lecturing when adequate social distancing can be maintained. Public health data, campus cases, and the latest public health guidance will be reviewed weekly. The requirement will be lifted when local public health conditions warrant.

This is not an action I take lightly, but it is a well-informed and vetted decision. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) currently places every county in Arkansas at “High Risk” on their [COVID-19 Integrated County View](#) statistics. I am encouraged by the recent increase in vaccinations in Arkansas. However, at the time of this writing, there are 874 active cases of COVID-19 in White County, 289 in Cleburne County, and 688 in Lonoke County. Vaccination rates for those 12 and older are 36.2% in White County, 36.2% in Cleburne County, and 39.1% in Lonoke County ([Arkansas Department of Health COVID-19 Update dashboard](#)). The CDC currently recommends all people wear a mask in public indoor settings, regardless of vaccination status ([CDC Interim Public Health Recommendations](#)).

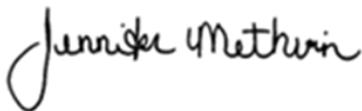
I know the rapid changes surrounding the authority to require masks has been confusing. In sum, on August 4, the Arkansas legislature went into Extraordinary Session to consider creating exceptions to ACT 1002, the 2021 law passed by the Arkansas Legislature that prohibits public entities, including higher education institutions, from requiring masks. However, the Legislature adjourned without taking any action. On August 6, 2021, Pulaski County Circuit Judge Tim Fox issued a preliminary injunction against ACT 1002. Today, August 12, 2021, the ASU System Board of Trustees granted Chancellors within the ASU System, in consultation with the ASU System President, the authority to require face coverings to be used on their respective campuses. The ASU System Senior Staff and Chancellors are closely monitoring not only the public health conditions but also these legal proceedings. Should something change, I will communicate that to the Vanguard Community.

I take great pride in the fact that we have had in-person learning at all campuses of ASU-Beebe throughout the entire pandemic. Because of the cooperation and diligence of our faculty, staff, and students, the campuses of ASU-Beebe have greatly mitigated the spread of COVID-19 among our campus community. This latest action is another step to continue to safeguard our learning community.

Vaccinations, face coverings, and social distancing are the best methods to ensure that we move beyond this health crisis. I encourage each of you to participate in all these efforts to #VanGUARDYourHealth and #ProtectOthers.

Thank you for your continued cooperation.

Sincerely,



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“Transforming Lives Through Quality Learning Experiences”