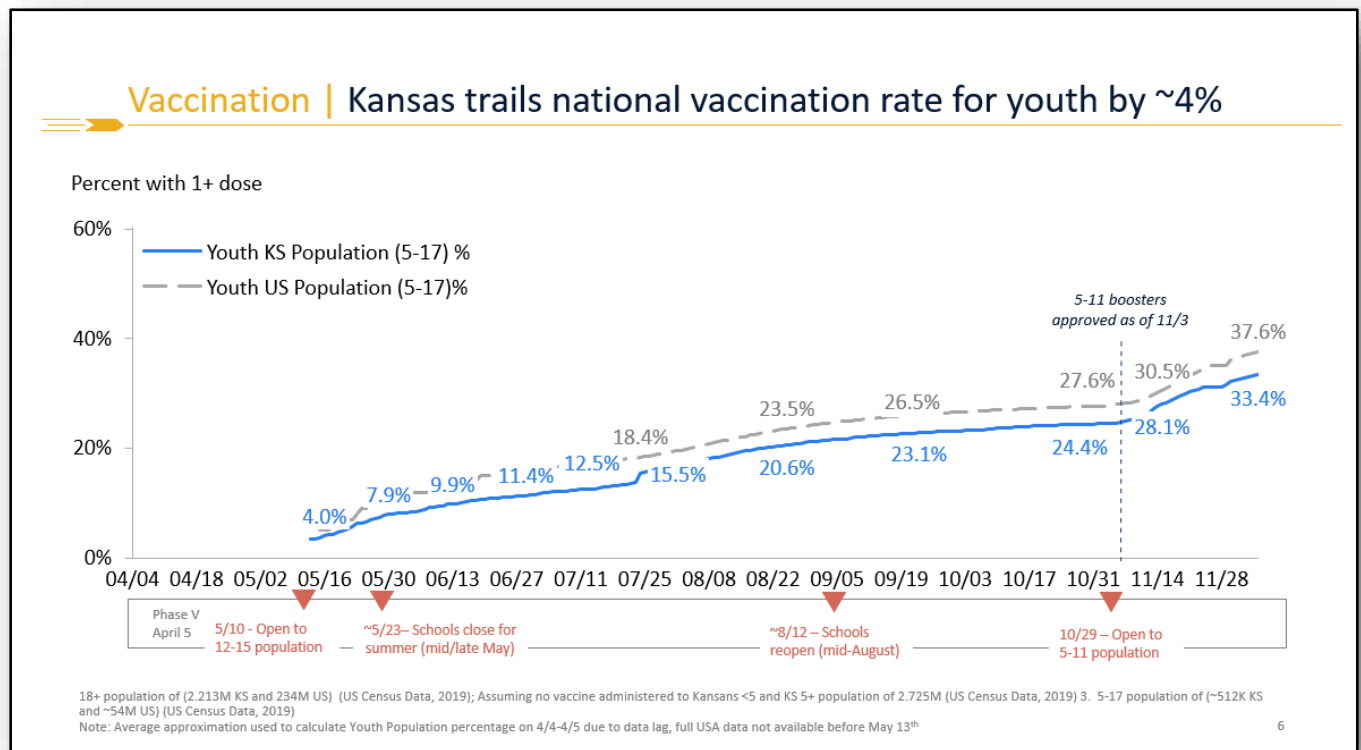


SAFER CLASSROOMS WORKGROUP
Weekly Report
December 8th, 2021

Dr. Jennifer Bacani-McKenney and Dr. Stephanie Kuhlmann, co-chairs of the Governor’s Safer Classrooms Workgroup, led the final planned Workgroup discussion on a recap of the COVID-19 effect on schooling in Kansas, vaccination efforts, mental health impact from COVID-19, importance of healthcare and school professionals’ collaboration.

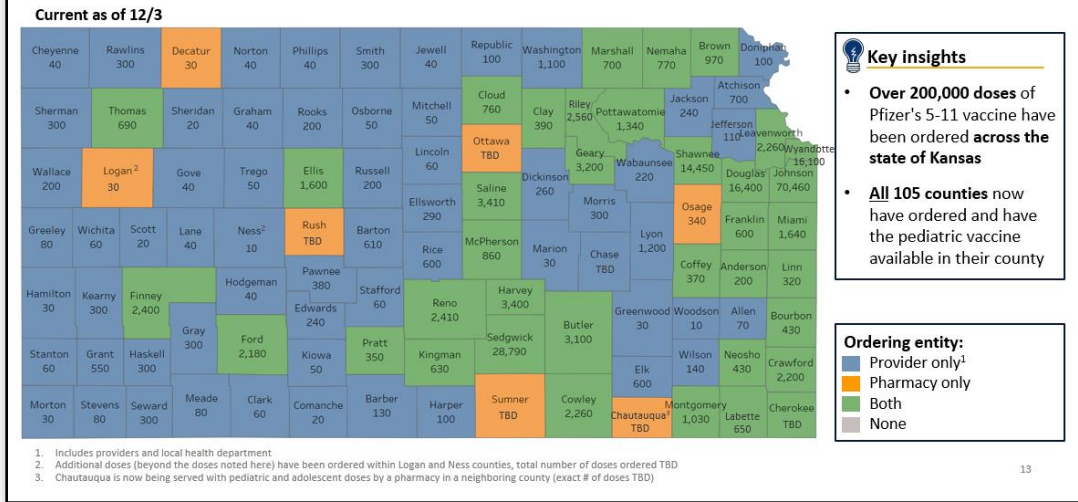


COVID-19 school metrics summary

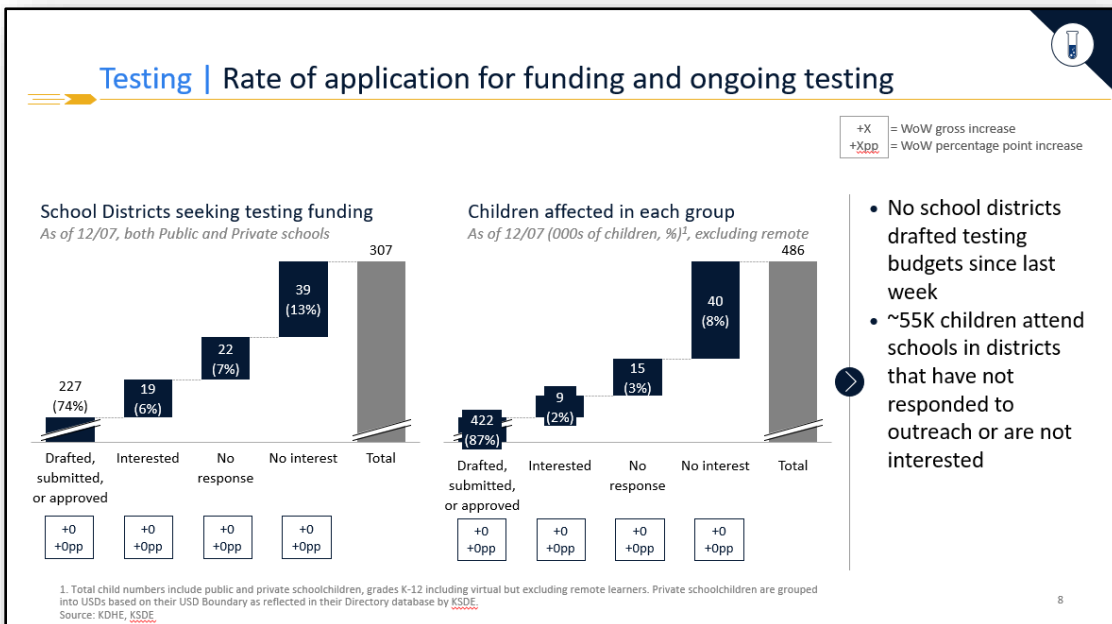
The Workgroup reviewed the latest data pertaining to Kansas schoolchildren and discussed the importance of using the following three key public health tools to keep schools safely open:

- Vaccination:** Kansas 5-17 youth vaccination rate (~34%) continues to trail the national eligible youth vaccination rate (~38%) by four percentage points. Efforts to vaccinate five-to-eleven-year-olds have been operational for over a month and continue to see progress. KDHE updated their FAQs to include information for five-to-eleven-year-olds vaccination, which can be found [here](#). The K-12 COVID-19 Dashboard continues to serve as an informative live tool to understand vaccination rates across School Districts and can be accessed [here](#). As of 12/3, all 105 counties have ordered the pediatric vaccine and over 200,000 orders of the pediatric doses have been placed statewide.

Kids 5-11 Vx | Map of pediatric providers that have ordered vaccines



- Testing:** Since last week, no additional School Districts submitted budgets for testing, keeping the total number of Districts that have drafted, submitted, or approved for testing funding at 227. 87% of Kansas students attend school in Districts that have drafted, submitted, or been approved for testing budgets. 11% of Kansas students attend school where no response has been received or where the District has expressed no interest in testing funding for students. As of this week, 144 School Districts are reporting testing results to KDHE, and 300 positive tests were reported across 84 Districts. This compares to 100 positive tests reported last week across 123 Districts.



3. **Masking:** 253 School Districts / private schools responded to KDHE's outreach on masking policies. 47% of Districts are implementing a policy of encouraging but not requiring masks (24% of Kansan students); 16% of School Districts have a mask requirement for all students (56% of students); 15% of School Districts have no mask policy (6% of students). 18% of Districts have not yet responded to the survey (7% of students).

There were 49 active outbreaks in KS schools as of this week; this compares to 53 active outbreaks last week and 54 outbreaks the week before. Looking at outbreak-related cases per 100,000 students, School Districts with mask requirements had 49 outbreak cases per 100,000 as of last week; School Districts with masks encouraged or no mask policies had more than 7x the number of outbreak cases per 100,000 students, at 344 cases per 100,000 students.

Why this matters and what this means:

A month after the CDC's approval of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for five-to-eleven-year-olds, the vaccine is widely available throughout Kansas and over 15% of five-to-eleven-year-olds have received their first dose. Families have the option to seek the vaccine through various channels including school vaccination clinics, LHDs, pediatric / family practice providers and pharmacies. Districts not yet involved in the testing program are encouraged to reach out to the Workgroup members and / or KDHE project specialists to facilitate testing programs, which can save schooldays for kids who would otherwise be sent home due to exposure. The [KDHE K-12 COVID-19 Dashboard](#) continues to be a useful tool for parents, educators, health providers, and other child advocates to understand the state of COVID-19 in their School District.

View from Schools

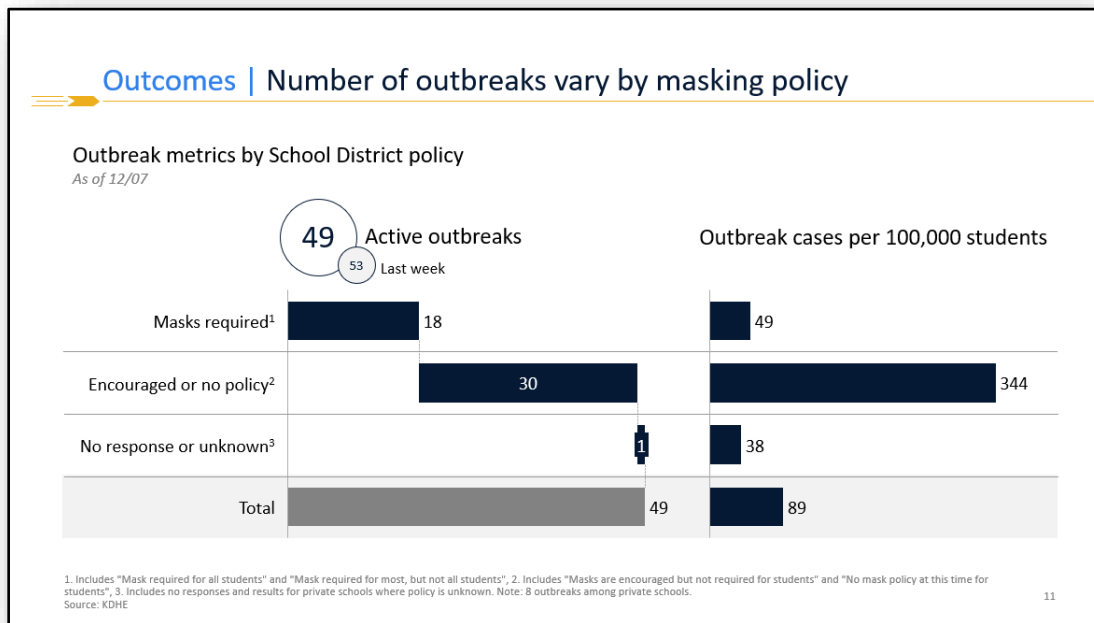
Dr. Watson provided a summary of the three phases schools have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. He highlighted the flexibility, hard work and challenges educators faced throughout each phase. He thanked them for their efforts in continuing to educate and keeping communities safe. He discussed the positive impact of the increased connection and collaboration between schools and health care professionals.

Topics discussed:

- Dr. Watson reiterated that vaccination remains the top measure to protect children from COVID-19 alongside other measures such as testing, masking, and distancing.
- He also expressed a desire to keep up the communication and collaboration between the healthcare community and schools in combating COVID-19 and other health issues. The relationships formed while addressing the COVID-19 crisis will prove to be valuable for students across various public health issues.
- Dr. Kuhlmann shared a similar hope, while discussing the work that has been done to bring healthcare professionals to the school setting.
- Kimber Kasitz provided an update on Wichita Public Schools vaccination clinics. To date, over 1,300 five-to-eleven-year-olds have been vaccinated by their clinics. Parents, siblings, and community members have also received vaccinations at the sites. She highlighted the positive response they have received from making the experience kid friendly by showing movies during the post vaccine administration monitoring period. She thanked KDHE for their help and suggested that other schools connect with them on establishing a clinic of their own.

Why this matters and what this means:

- The Workgroup members encouraged parents to get their children vaccinated.
- Schools are crucial in helping families access the vaccine through mass vaccination clinics. Schools are encouraged to set up their own vaccination clinics and to reach out to KDHE/LHDs for support as needed. They can also contact Kimber Kasitz for best practices when establishing a clinic.
- The vaccine will be a particularly useful tool for curbing infection through the holiday season; as travel and in-person gatherings increase, the vaccine is the most effective way to protect family members of all ages and to mitigate the risk of outbreaks in schools following the holidays.



View from healthcare providers

The Workgroup members from the medical community discussed vaccination efforts throughout the state, mental health amongst youths, and the Omicron variant.

Topics discussed:

- Dr. Kristie Clark shared an update around COVID-19 and its uptick in rural communities. She shared it is beginning to stress the rural healthcare system. She pointed out that majority of cases are from unvaccinated individuals, followed by adults who have not received a booster dose yet. She urged community members to get the vaccine for themselves and their families, highlighting the safety and efficacy it provides in fighting COVID-19.
- Dr. Jennifer Bacani-McKenney shared that she began administering pediatric doses and has found patients are grateful for the service. In rural communities, access to the vaccine can pose a larger obstacle. She encouraged providers to join the vaccination effort and thanked those who already have.
- The medical professionals provided an update on the Omicron variant and discussed how more data / insights are needed to determine the impact it will have. Although the variant is not in Kansas, it's future presence is expected.

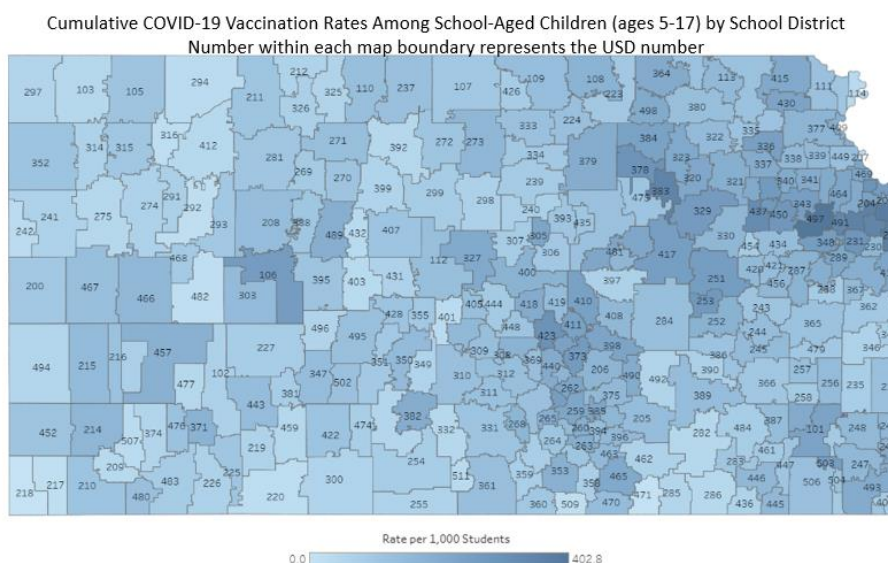
- Dr. Netson shared the [Surgeon General advisory on youth mental health](#) and the difficulty COVID-19 has put on mental health. She commented on the increase in reported distress amongst youths, the difficulty in obtaining appointments with professionals, and the efforts schools are making to help with emotional wellness. She encouraged parents to check in with their kids and to play the role of a listener and sounding board. She also discussed the resources available if someone is having a mental health crisis including, the emergency room, connecting with your physician, and the suicide awareness hotline
- Ashley Goss echoed the resources laid out by Kelli Netson and highlighted this as an area of focus for KDHE.
- The medical professionals in the Workgroup shared the importance of having a plan for preventive measures, integrating back into school and other high stress situations, restrictions on dangerous items (e.g., weapons, medications, etc.) and contact information for resources if a crisis occurs.

Why this matters and what this means:

- Providers are excited by the initial demand for five-to-eleven-year-olds vaccinations. It is a huge step to keep kids and schools safe. They recognize work needs to be done to continue the demand and momentum amongst parents for this age group.
- The Workgroup encouraged adults, kids, and parents to connect with their providers to continue educating themselves. Parents can seek information from schools, LHDs, KDHE and providers to gain answers and comfort in the vaccine. Boosters are likely needed for adults to combat the winter surge in COVID-19.
- Mental health continues to be a public health crisis and concerns about youth mental health have only increased during the pandemic, as months of social isolation, school closures and other pandemic-related difficulties are believed to have fueled increased levels of anxiety and depression. Resources for the community are available and are continuing to be developed; all are encouraged to reach out for help when they or someone they know needs it.



Vaccination | Youth vaccination rates by County



Source: KS WebIZ, as of 12/7

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The Safer Classrooms Workgroup will not meet again. Prior meetings are available on the Governor's YouTube channel. Viewers are encouraged to reach out to Kansas COVID Workgroup for Kids (KCWK) at kansasCOVIDworkgroup4kids@gmail.com if they have questions about COVID-19 questions relating to children.

Workgroup members:

<i>Stephanie Kuhlmann, MD</i>	<i>Rhonda Hutchison, BSN, RN</i>
<i>Jennifer Bacani-McKenney, MD</i>	<i>Kimber Kasitz, BSN, RN</i>
<i>Jen Brull, MD</i>	<i>Vernon Mills, MD</i>
<i>G.A. Buie</i>	<i>Kelli Netson, Ph.D</i>
<i>Lindsay Byrnes, MD, MPH</i>	<i>Kevin Riemann</i>
<i>Kristie Clark, MD</i>	<i>Manuel Solano, MD</i>
<i>Allen Greiner, MD, MPH</i>	<i>Margaret Thompson, RN, ARNP</i>
<i>Dena Hubbard, MD</i>	<i>Randy Watson, Ed.D, MS</i>