

To the parents of school-age children
and to pupils attending school in Thuringia

2021/22 school year

Refocusing on education

Dear parents and pupils,

Thuringia begins its new school year on September 6, 2021. This new school year brings with it two particular tasks for schools. We will continue to undertake measures to combat the spread of the coronavirus; and in terms of teaching, we will pick up with students where they left off after the long phases of distance learning. The schools are well-equipped for both tasks.

With respect to the first task, we've made tremendous progress as a society in the past months thanks to vaccinations. This will allow us to operate schools with considerably fewer restrictions for pupils and for you as families in the future. **A school year of face-to-face learning lies ahead of us.** Preventive school closures will no longer take place.

We rely hereby on the recommendations of the scientific advisory board of the Thuringian state government, according to which vaccination of adults and youth is the most important factor for safe schools during the pandemic. As you are aware, the German Standing Committee on Vaccination now recommends vaccination for 12- to 17-year-olds. I would like to ask you to inform yourself about the advantages and side effects of the preventive coronavirus vaccination. Information material is available at: <https://bildung.thueringen.de/ministerium/coronavirus/impfen>.

Please also consult with your doctor on this issue. The state government provides support to school communities actively interested in vaccination at school; the Thuringian association of statutory health insurance physicians will deploy mobile vaccination teams to these schools. If you are interested in this option, please bring it up at your next parent-teacher conference or the next school assembly.

Of course protective measures continue to be necessary. Beyond the generally valid, well-established rules for good hygiene, a system of additional protective measures is in place to react to verified infections at school, and will be adjusted to the regional infection levels (warning level system). The purpose of all these measures is to allow

pupils to learn at school. A key element of these protective measures is the implementation of the 3G principle, which allows restrictions to be eased for pupils who are recovered from the illness, vaccinated against the virus, or tested (in German: “genesen, geimpft, getestet,” hence the abbreviation “3G”). For details about the warning levels and the corresponding rules, please refer to our website at: <https://bildung.thueringen.de/ministerium/coronavirus>.

For better safety after the summer break, we will begin the school year with a **two-week “safety buffer”** throughout the state, regardless of the warning level in your particular city or county.

- During this period, masks are mandatory, even during classroom instruction. Only pupils in grades 1-4 may sit at their desks without a mask during classroom instruction.
- As part of the 3G principle, we will initiate mandatory testing for all pupils who are not yet completely vaccinated or recovered. The tests can take place at school, or a certificate from one of the numerous test centers may be submitted. Those who refuse testing will not be excluded from lessons, but will be instructed in separate groups. This separation concept requires that sufficient space and staff are available at the respective school; otherwise, all pupils will be taught together in their regular learning groups at the school. They will also be required to wear masks in *all* grades, including during classroom instruction. Furthermore, during the phase of mandatory testing, any pupil who does not provide evidence of a current test conducted outside of the school, recovery from the illness or vaccination, and also does not take part in the testing program at school, will face a fine.

Attached to this letter (also available for download at www.bildung.thueringen.de), please find the current consent and opt-out form, which you should fill out and send with your child. You may also request a confirmation of test results from your school, which in Thuringia is valid as a test certificate outside of school.

A core principle of the pandemic response is that sick children should not go to school. This is essential not only to prevent coronavirus, but also because of growing concern about other waves of illness in the autumn. You must therefore expect your child to be excluded from attending school if he/she has symptoms. Please be sure to then consult a doctor to properly diagnose the illness.

Returning to face-to-face instruction allows us to pursue the second objective of the coming school year: **compensating learning deficits**. Schools, teachers, children, youth and families reacted differently to distance learning and the numerous changes necessary. Many pupils were inadvertently slowed down in their educational development. During the weeks before summer break, we observed this not only in terms of knowledge levels but also in fundamental learning competencies (including

concentration, physical agility, social interaction and conflict management).

Schools will take various approaches to compensate these different levels of learning. We are committed to picking up with every pupil wherever he or she left off. Three areas are particularly important for us: physical motor development, socio-emotional development and cognitive development, in particular language development as the foundation for educational success. Over the course of the next two school years, we will take advantage of a federal program to fund additional teacher workload, professional development and third-party offerings to enable us to provide the proper support everyone needs. In the first half-year, the school will determine your child's individual needs and what assistance is suitable. For more information about the federal program in Thuringia, please visit (under construction) <https://bildung.thueringen.de/aufholen-nach-corona>. Your teachers will provide you with additional information.

I look forward to a successful start to the 2021/22 school year, with hopefully as few restrictions as possible.

Sincerely,

Helmut Holter
Thuringian Minister
of Education, Youth and Sports