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PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

January 21, 2021

Schelli Slaughter, MHA
Director

Dimyana Abdelmalek, MD, MPH
Health Officer

Dear Thurston Superintendents and Heads of Schools,

In my letter on January 15, 2021, I affirmed Thurston County is in alignment with the [Washington State Department of Health's decision framework](#) for opening schools and confirmed the pertinent metrics and key health indicators. I also stated I would continue monitoring for another week to determine the impacts of transmission related to the winter holidays, along with trends in transmission and public health's capacity to respond. We are now 21 days out from the winter holidays and remain in the moderate transmission range for school operations. As of today:

- Thurston County Public Health and Social Services has the capacity to respond to cases that may occur in schools, identify those who are close contacts in need of quarantine, and investigate instances of COVID-19 transmission in the schools.
- Testing capacity in Thurston County is adequate.
- Thurston County's current rate per 100k of newly diagnosed confirmed and probable COVID-19 cases over the last two weeks is 293.6.
- Test positive rate is 7.8%.
- Thurston County's trend in cases has decreased over the past 7 days.

I am recommending schools use the [Washington State Department of Health decision making framework](#) and cautiously phase in in-person learning for K-5 and middle school students. Once Thurston County's rates are below 200 cases per 100K, I recommend phasing in high school students.

Modeling data and experience has shown the mitigation measures including maintaining 6 feet of distance, wearing masks, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, staying home when sick, identifying and quarantining close contacts (being less than 6 feet for a cumulative 15 minutes or more over a 24 hour period), and enhanced cleaning measures are effective tools for mitigating spread of COVID-19 in schools. Safety is further enhanced by maintaining small groups and following hybrid models of education. Small groups are defined by Washington State Department of Health as 15 students or fewer.

With our current rates of transmission, I expect to see cases of COVID-19 in our schools reflecting the risk of COVID-19 in our community, however with the mitigation measures currently in place informed by [Washington State Department of Health guidance](#) and [Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction guidance](#), we can minimize transmission of disease in our schools.

The COVID-19 situation in our county is dynamic. I will continue to make recommendations based on the best available data and state guidance. We have many challenges ahead as we navigate the COVID-19

pandemic in Thurston County. I commend you for your efforts to create safe learning environments for our children and educational professionals. I look forward to our continued partnership.

Sincerely,



Dimyana Abdelmalek MD, MPH
Health Officer, Thurston County