



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

John Hutchings
District One

Gary Edwards
District Two

Tye Menser
District Three

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND
SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

July 30, 2020

Schelli Slaughter, Director
Dimyana Abdelmalek, MD, MPH
Health Officer

Dear Thurston County Private K-12 Educational Organizations,

As Thurston County Health Officer, pursuant to the authority granted by the legislature in RCW 70.05.070(3), in order to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 within my jurisdiction, at this time I strongly urge and recommend all K-12 schools to remain closed to in-person general instruction for the 2020 Fall term and for districts to utilize distance learning modalities.

Districts may elect to offer in-person specialized learning opportunities to groups of no more than five students, provided the district follows all state and local health and safety requirements. Failure to comply with this recommendation may require stronger restrictions in the future up to and including mandatory closure.

As of July 1, Thurston County had 273 confirmed cases. As of yesterday, July 29, 2020, the cumulative number of confirmed cases is 628 with a rate of 60.5 new cases per 100,000 people in our county over the past two weeks, or more than 100 cases per week. This rate of increase is significantly higher than the <25 cases per 100,000 people over two weeks which is the state target for Phase 3 counties.

Our schools are vital to our community providing quality education in addition to the many other crucial functions, including support for children with special needs, nutrition support, social-emotional learning, and allowing parents to work, among many others. Therefore, it is essential to protect the health of our students and those who teach and work in our schools. At

this time, I do not believe we can open schools for in-person learning safely. The COVID-19 situation is dynamic and as conditions change in Thurston County and across the state, I may change this recommendation. Onsite and hybrid models are still possible later in the year as conditions permit. I ask all local schools to develop a plan to transition to those modalities if the situation improves.

The Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department is collaborating with other local health jurisdictions, as well as the Washington State Department of Health, on a unified approach to schools across the state. Additional guidance may follow as a result of this collaboration.

This is an unprecedented time and it is important for us to all work together to stop the spread of COVID-19. Keeping our students, and educational and support staff healthy is essential to the health of our county. I look forward to working with all of you as we reduce transmission rates to a level where a safe return to public life is possible.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D Abdelmalek, MD". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Dimyana Abdelmalek, MD, MPH
Health Officer, Thurston County

