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PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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Health Officer Statement

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On March 25, 2021, Governor Inslee announced Washington State will follow the CDC recommendations to require at least three feet of physical distancing between students in certain situations. The Department of Health (DOH) updated their [K-12 Schools 2020-2021 Guidance](#) which clarifies the physical distancing changes for students in schools. Scientific studies and data support the reduction of distancing requirements in specific situations.

The K-12 school guidance outlines the following recommendations:

- Practice physical distancing of at least three feet or more between students within groups and in classrooms as much as possible. Staff should continue to maintain six feet of physical distance from other staff and students in classrooms and otherwise.
- At least six feet of distance must be maintained for the following circumstances:
 - Between staff in the school building and between adults and students.
 - For all staff and students
 - In common areas, such as auditoriums.
 - When masks can't be worn, such as when eating.
 - During activities when increased exhalation occurs, such as singing, shouting, band practice, or physical education. These activities should be moved outdoors or to large, well-ventilated spaces whenever possible.
- Meals: If students use the cafeteria, keep cohorts together. Ensure physical distance of at least six feet between students in a cohort/group and between other groups when eating meals.

In areas with high community transmission, CDC and DOH recommend that middle and high school students use cohorting (grouping students) and at least three feet of distance between students or at least six feet of physical distance between students if cohorting is not possible. CDC defines high community transmission as COVID-19 case rate of greater than 200 cases per 100,000 population over 14 days or test positivity is greater than 10%. Community case rates and test positivity are available by county on the [Governor's Risk Assessment Dashboard](#) and [DOH Data Dashboard](#).

Schools have been able to implement the three feet distancing guidance since March 25th. School districts can make decisions to resume full-time operations if they are able to meet the requirements as stated in CDC and DOH guidance documents. Each school district may implement this guidance in the timeframe which is operationally functional for their specific circumstances.

The Thurston County Local Health Jurisdiction offers technical assistance to help schools implement health and safety guidance and enforces state, federal, and local public health statutes in order to prevent and control the spread of contagious and infectious disease, but does not have any more or less restrictive local guidance, laws, ordinances, or rules in place pertaining to this matter.

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