



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

October 14, 2020

Schelli Slaughter, MHA
Director

Dimyana Abdelmalek, MD, MPH
Health Officer

Dear Thurston County Superintendents and Heads of Schools,

On September 23, 2020, I made the recommendation to start a cautious slow, careful, phased approach to some in-person learning using the Washington State Department of Health decision framework, OSPI, and CDC guidance. Since my last letter, disease transmission in Thurston County has been increasing. When I made the recommendation, disease transmission rates were 30.8 as of September 19, 2020 and declining. Unfortunately, I have seen a significant increase in transmission rates and our percent positivity for COVID-19 testing has increased as well.

While we are still in the moderate disease transmission range, I am concerned about this persistent elevation in our case counts. At this time, I am strongly recommending at least a 14-day pause for expansion of hybrid in-person learning models. Students who are currently engaged in hybrid in-person learning models can continue, but I recommend no increase in students or days in hybrid in-person instruction while I monitor transmission rates in our community.

I recommend school districts continue providing instruction to high-needs students in small groups of five during this pause. Providing educational services to the high-needs student population is important. I have confidence in the safety policies and procedures each school district has in place because there has not been an outbreak at any of our schools to date and many school districts have been having small cohort groups in their buildings for some time. Since our transmission rates continue to climb, moving large groups of students to and from school and having more students in classrooms is not advised. I commend your efforts to practice physical distancing, masking, health screenings, and cleaning procedures to keep students and staff safe when they are at school.

I am making this recommendation due to a persistent uptrend in our county's transmission rates and I believe a pause is warranted to determine if our county is going to reach high transmission levels of greater than 75 cases per 100,000 population over 14 days. If high transmission conditions persist for a preponderance of 14 days, I will recommend a return to distance learning for all students, with the exception of cohort groups of five students with the highest need.

In two weeks, after I evaluate where we are at, if transmission rates within Thurston County remain stable in the moderate transmission range, and there is sufficient health care capacity and public health capacity in our community to sustain the COVID-19 response and mitigation efforts, I will recommend you continue to slowly and carefully phase in more hybrid in-person learning following Washington State DOH, OSPI, and CDC guidance.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents unique challenges and the situation in Thurston County is dynamic. As the conditions change my guidance may also change to reflect the best available science in conjunction with our local conditions. I commend you all for your hard work and efforts to support students and teachers who work and learn in our schools and your resolve to keep everyone safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

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

Dimyana Abdelmalek, MD, MPH
Thurston County Health Officer