

July 27, 2020

Dear Kitsap County School District Superintendents:

Based on the COVID-19 disease activity in Kitsap County and our region, we do not feel it is safe to open schools for traditional classroom learning in August or September. The Kitsap Public Health District and Kitsap Public Health Officer support Kitsap's school district plans to provide online educational services as the 2020-21 school year begins, in order to protect the health of students, staff, family members, and our broader community.

The Kitsap Public Health District recognizes that school districts need to plan ahead and make decisions for the upcoming school year while the body of science and knowledge about COVID-19 evolves. We understand that students, teachers, families, and the community need decisions to be made sooner --- rather than later --- about when schools will resume educational services and how those educational services will be implemented. Further, we acknowledge the current upward trajectory of COVID-19 disease across the county, state, and nation increases the difficulty of making these decisions now for this Fall, not to mention that the evolving incidence of COVID-19 transmission may require these school plans to be changed in the future

[Kitsap County's COVID transmission](#) is currently at its highest level since the disease arrived in Kitsap, with 56.2 cases per 100,000 population reported over the two-week period ending July 18, and cases have increased steadily since that time. Kitsap has experienced more COVID-19 cases in the first three-and-a-half weeks of July (289) than the total of all positive cases from the months from February through June. Kitsap has also seen its percent of positive results for all tests rise from about 1% to the current 7.2%, indicating the rate of positive tests is growing faster than the rate of testing overall.

COVID-19 can present with mild symptoms, especially among children, but can also cause severe complications and even death, especially among people with chronic health conditions. This makes the escalating spread we are seeing in Kitsap right now especially concerning for any consideration of in-person educational activities. It is not just the health of the students that we are concerned about, but also the staff, teachers, and families that students have daily contact with that can be impacted by the spread of COVID-19.

The most common sources of COVID among new cases are household members, travel, and social gatherings of more than 5 people. Conditions in Kitsap are clearly not conducive for the type of large, indoor gatherings required for in-person instruction, and such gatherings would increase the risk of COVID transmission among students, staff, families, and the community.

kitsappublichealth.org



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For these reasons, we support school districts in Kitsap to start with providing educational services online as we enter the 2020-21 school year, except for in-person services required by the Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. At this time, gatherings of more than 5 persons are prohibited in Kitsap County under Phase 2 of the governor's Safe Start plan. This includes extracurricular and athletic activities, and we support postponement of these activities as well.

We appreciate the collaborative and careful approach Kitsap's school superintendents have taken to make this very difficult decision, and the planning that has and will be necessary to develop readiness for in-person learning when and if that becomes advisable.

Sincerely,

Susan Turner MD, MPH, MS, Health Officer

N. Gibson Morrow MD, MPH, Health Officer as of August 1, 2020

Keith Grellner, Administrator