

Dear Pierce County School Superintendents:

Based on the COVID-19 disease activity in Pierce County and our region, I do not feel it is safe to open schools in September for traditional classroom learning.

COVID-19 affects every geographic area of our community, all age groups and all ethnic groups. Our daily case numbers in early June were in the teens; now we have had days in the triple digits. Our 14-day total rate was 16 per 100,000 in early June and is now 125, much higher than the State's target of 25. The sharp increase of COVID-19 cases in Pierce County means hospitalizations and deaths will follow.

We all understand the importance of quality education, social-emotional learning, addressing food and special needs, parents' need to work, and so many other critical issues. However, it is of utmost importance that we protect the health of our students, education professionals and school support staff. At this time, I do not feel we can do so if we open schools for onsite instruction in September.

The situation could change, and I may change my recommendation at a later date. I am offering this recommendation to respect our local school districts' needs to plan and implement their education models. Schools should still plan for onsite and hybrid options that districts could implement later in the academic year if the situation improves.

Representatives from Public Health Seattle King County, Snohomish Health District and Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department are working on an ethics consultation with the Department of Health to help develop frameworks for decision making for schools. We may offer further guidance in the coming days as a result of this consultation.

I call on the residents of Pierce County to care for one another. When you maintain physical distance, wear a mask, wash your hands, and stay home when you're sick, you protect yourself as well as your loved ones, friends, and neighbors. Your choices today could have grave implications for others tomorrow.

Everyone should take these steps to protect the people you care about:

- Stay close to home.
- Wear a mask when you leave home.
- Limit your interactions to a small circle of friends and family.
- Keep gatherings small, and if possible, outside where fresh air circulates.
- Stay 6 feet apart from others. Wear a mask when you cannot maintain 6 feet of space.
- Get tested for COVID-19 if you are experiencing symptoms, are a member of a heavily affected community—Black, Latinx, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Island, American Indian, Alaska Native—or have participated in any gatherings—social, civic, business, political, athletic or otherwise.
- Wash your hands, cover your cough, and keep up your best hygiene and sanitation.

We will continue carefully reviewing the data and adjust recommendations for schools as the situation changes. Follow along on our data dashboards at www.tpchd.org/coronavirus.

Sincerely,



Anthony L-T Chen, MD, MPH
Director of Health

