



July 28, 2020

Dear Benton and Franklin County School Superintendents,

Benton-Franklin Health District (BFHD) has been working closely with local school districts in discussion on reopening of schools. At this time, the COVID-19 case count for Benton County is over 360 per 100,000 residents in a 14-day period; Franklin County's is over 616 per 100,000. Representatives from local public health are currently working in consultation with the Washington State Department of Health to develop frameworks for public health decision-making for reopening schools. These frameworks will include metrics for safe reopening. At this time, Benton and Franklin Counties are both well above any metrics being discussed. We may offer further guidance in the coming days, when the results of this framework are finalized.

BFHD understands the important role that schools play in quality education, social-emotional learning, addressing special needs, and providing assistance meeting basic needs. However, we also believe that protecting the health of our students and school staff should be a priority. At this time, I do not recommend schools reopen on September 1, 2020 for in-person instruction except for considerations for small group (<5) instruction to support educationally at-risk students.

BFHD will continue to work with local school districts in the coming weeks and months, and recommendations may change based on case numbers or state guidance. We ask that local school districts join us in promoting public health messages regarding reopening and adherence to state and local guidelines.

Sincerely,

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