



July 29, 2020

TO: Snohomish County Public K-12 Superintendents
Snohomish County Private School Administrators

**SUBJECT: Education Planning for Fall 2020
Recommendation for Remote Learning to Begin Fall 2020 School Term**

The incidence of newly reported COVID-19 cases continues to rise in Snohomish County. After reaching a low of approximately 20 cases per 100,000 per 14 days in early June, that rate has since steadily climbed to nearly 100—virtually identical to that rate which we experienced when schools were first closed in March.

Although we now have more knowledge about the means for preventing transmission than we did at the outset of the pandemic, our experience implementing that in the local school setting is negligible. Even in the context of lower transmission rates and a strong prevention effort, cases and outbreaks would likely still occur in schools. However, given the current high level and continued upward trajectory of COVID-19 rates in Snohomish County, cases and outbreaks in schools seem likely to occur at a level that poses substantial additional risk to the school and the surrounding community—especially its medically vulnerable members. Such a level of school-based transmission also would impose considerable demands and instability on school operations and conceivably could outpace our collective efforts to control it.

Returning to in-person learning together with the ancillary services, social supports and other enhancing activities that come along with in-person education is a goal that is shared by the Health District. Yet, the reality of an attempt at in-person learning in the current situation would likely fall far short of that ideal and may come at an unacceptable cost in human health and further disruption of the learning environment. **Given this current situation and being aware of your need to plan for the start of the academic year, I strongly recommend that you plan for distance learning at the start of the school year.**

I realize that this recommendation extends the hardship, uncertainty and equity gaps already imposed on students, families, and the entire school community in our response to this sustained public health crisis. A multi-agency workgroup involving state and local education and public health staff, along with representation from education-oriented non-governmental organizations, is working to address learning needs, childcare, and other branching impacts of this difficult choice. I also anticipate that the Health District will support exceptions in your plans to allow for in-person learning among small cohorts of high-need children with proper prevention measures in place.

Meanwhile, the Health District will continue its ongoing work with other local public health jurisdictions and the Washington State Department of Health to further refine our guidance, monitor disease activity, and support your districts with technical assistance on COVID-19 prevention. I look forward to continuing our regular communication and collaboration as we navigate together through this difficult time and identify the circumstances, timing, and methods to permit a successful transition to in-person learning.

Sincerely,

Christopher Spitters, MD, MPH
Health Officer

cc: Snohomish Health District Board of Health