

Dear Pierce County School Partners:

Thank you for your ongoing partnership and your conversations over the past few weeks. I am clarifying two issues:

1. I am not simply recommending but am requiring all schools to begin the school year using distance learning until COVID-19 disease activity in Pierce County decreases to a level safe to re-open schools for in-person learning.
2. For the exceptions indicated in the Washington State Department of Health decision tree, we will interpret “small groups” to mean five or less.

We agree on the importance of education, the value of in-person education for students, and the multiple roles schools play in supporting families and the community. However, with the high rate of community transmission we have experienced since mid-June, I am concerned about the safety of students, teachers, and staff and the exacerbation of community transmission.

Our daily case count remains at very high levels. We have reported 1170 cases in the last 14 days. Our 14-day case rate per 100,000 is 130. By comparison, this rate was 16 when we entered Phase 2 in early June. It was 125 when I issued my recommendation in July, and 149 at our peak on August 4. We had our highest daily case count reported on August 6 with 123 COVID-19 cases.

On August 5, Governor Inslee shared the Washington State Department of Health [Decision Tree](#) for providing in-person learning to public and private K-12 students during COVID-19. Pierce County is currently at the “High” disease activity level.

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department is interpreting the “strongly recommend distance learning” in the Decision Tree as a requirement. All Pierce County schools must use distance learning to begin the 2020-2021 school year. We are also interpreting the “option for limited in-person learning in small groups” to mean groups of five or less.

We monitor disease activity closely. I am prepared to revise this requirement when I am confident disease trends in the County are low and stable.

You are leaders in your communities. I am calling on you to help model and lead residents of Pierce County in caring for one another. Please share these messages in person and on social media with members of your community.

- When you practice healthy habits, you protect yourself and everyone around you.
- Maintain physical distance, wear a mask, wash your hands, and stay home when you’re sick.
- Your choices today will help return our children to in-person learning.

We will review data and adjust our recommendations as the situation changes. Follow along on our data dashboards at tpchd.org/COVID19cases. Thank you, again for your partnership.

Sincerely,



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