



*Leading our communities to a healthier future.*

---

July 27, 2020

Dear School Boards and Superintendents of Denton County,

As of the date of this letter, COVID-19 disease transmission is widespread and growing in Denton County. Case counts and positivity rates are increasing weekly, and new daily records in numbers of cases and fatalities continue across the metroplex. Disease transmission is prevalent and group gatherings remain a concern. Active cases are increasing, case investigations are mounting, laboratories are delayed in reporting due to increased volume of tests performed, and compounding delays are hampering effective contact tracing. While current hospital capacity remains largely available in the county, concerns of the effects of these rising cases and the costs to our most vulnerable residents are increasing. We recognize that Denton County has yet to see rates, hospitalizations and deaths that other communities have suffered, yet the reporting trends indicate a worsening of transmission.

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released research and recommendations on July 23<sup>rd</sup> on school openings for the coming school year, and highlighted emerging research on transmission of COVID-19 that may be encouraging as the year progresses. CDC highlights the importance of in-person instruction and Denton County Public Health (DCPH) agrees that traditional educational models are best—for students, families and our underserved populations in particular. However, CDC also indicates that schools should only begin to meet in-person when community transmission is low. Regretably, our community transmission is on the rise—affecting not just children or teachers, but all ages of our families, friends and neighbors.

In light of the available scientific knowledge of transmission, community trends in case reporting, balancing potential unintended implications of adjusting school calendars, DCPH continues to advise school boards and superintendents as we have done since early 2020. As no vaccine is currently available and sporadic compliance with facial covering and physical distancing recommendations have not been sufficient to mitigate the spread of disease thus far, **DCPH is providing this countywide recommendation:**

1. Delay face-to-face instruction until September 8<sup>th</sup>  
The following exceptions may be necessary, and should require continual use of facial coverings and physical distancing:

- 
- on-site virtual instruction activities by administrators, teachers and staff
  - school-sponsored events/activities such as UIL sports, bands, choirs, competitions and similar events may be conducted outdoors
  - self-contained special education instruction may occur when necessary and in accordance with TEA guidelines, as feasible
2. Schools should conduct virtual, remote or distance learning activities, in compliance with their approved start dates, prior to Tuesday, September 8<sup>th</sup> to meet TEA requirements
  3. School administrators, teachers and staff may return to school campuses to provide virtual learning instructional activities, provide food distribution including free and reduced lunch services and to perform administrative duties, as consistent with TEA guidelines
  4. Schools should create, maintain and provide a safety protocol/plan for resuming in-person instruction on or after Tuesday, September 8<sup>th</sup> to the school boards and disseminate the plan to parents and stakeholders two weeks prior to re-opening campuses, per ISD approved calendars

This recommendation is in compliance with the spirit and content of Executive Orders by Governor Greg Abbott, as well as guidance for ISDs provided by the TEA. DCPH commits to continued surveillance of COVID-19 and frequent communication regarding countywide disease transmission. DCPH may, depending on future situations, update these recommendations to address current events and their effects on the public's health.

DCPH remains a committed, available partner in preventing the spread of COVID-19 and is equally committed to assisting ISDs in returning to in-person teaching. Our collective hope is to return to traditional education as soon as possible, with the knowledge that the global pandemic response will ultimately determine how "normalcy" will return to our schools.

With sincerity and appreciation,



Marty Buchanan, MD, PhD  
Health Authority



Matt Richardson, DrPH, MPH, FACHE  
Director