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 23rd 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. Regretfully, our community transmission is on the rise—afflicting 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 8th
   The following exceptions may be necessary, and should require continual use of facial coverings and physical distancing:

535 S. LOOP 288, SUITE 1003, DENTON, TX 76205
(940) 349.2900 I PUBLICHEALTH@DENTONCOUNTY.COM
DENTONCOUNTY.COM/HEALTH
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 8th 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 8th 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