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Many Questions Unanswered About School Calendar Proposals Driven by COVID-19, says Association for Texas Professional Educators

State's largest educator association shares member concerns about potential changes

AUSTIN, Texas—The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE), the largest educator association in Texas, is actively monitoring discussions surrounding proposed recommendations for school calendars from the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

TEA and Commissioner **Mike Morath** recently [published guidance for Texas school districts to consider](#) (see "**School Calendar Considerations**") as they weigh potential adjustments to school calendars stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. Options outlined by TEA include shifting to an earlier school start date through a District of Innovation plan or, more dramatically, moving to a year-round school calendar.

Citing concerns about a future resurgence of the virus and the likelihood of higher student absences next year, the agency also touts the virtues of an "intersessional" school calendar that would provide for longer holidays and "breaks" interspersed throughout the school year.

ATPE has received multiple messages from its educator members across Texas highlighting concerns about these calendar recommendations and how they might impact classrooms.

"As a professional association for Texas educators, ATPE is monitoring these discussions and providing information to our membership about school calendar requirements and considerations," said **Jennifer Mitchell**, ATPE Governmental Relations Director. "There are facets to these proposals that need to be considered by education officials before it becomes likely a large number of school districts would jump at the chance to change their plans for the upcoming school year."

For instance:

- School calendar decisions rest primarily with local school districts under Texas law and are shared publicly as early as January. Changing the 2020-21 school calendar at this point could create significant challenges for school employees, parents, and community stakeholders.
- While some have spoken out in favor of a school year extension, such as in this [May 15 editorial by the Dallas Morning News calling for the adoption of year-round calendars](#), it's unclear whether communities will be quick to embrace such a change.
- An intersessional calendar could be burdensome for parents of schoolchildren if not offset by adequate childcare accommodations. Children at home rather than in school need supervision. Families already grapple with reduced childcare options during the prolonged

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summer break; school holidays could last for as long as six weeks and vary from district to district.

- School funding is limited by the Texas Legislature’s two-year budget, which is not scheduled to be reviewed until 2021. The lack of assurance that additional instructional days will be adequately funded makes the prospect of an extension problematic.
- Finally, TEA recommends that longer school vacations and holidays be used for student remediation. However, TEA has not offered districts guidance on how to pay for the additional instruction, teacher contracts, or facility plans, nor have they explained how these so-called “breaks” can be rightly called breaks if students and employees are expected to work during them.

It is unclear whether these questions will be answered in time for school districts to make well-informed decisions about potentially major changes to their 2020-21 school calendars. However, due to the fluidity of the situation and the ever-evolving crisis stemming from COVID-19, ATPE will continue to share frequent updates, information, and resources with its membership in addition to its existing benefits.

“ATPE staff and experts will remain available to our members to provide assistance and guidance, and we will continue to share updates on our frequently updated [COVID-19 FAQ and Resources Page](#) on [ATPE.org](#),” said Mitchell. “We will also continue to offer our input and our members’ feedback to school officials as they weigh these important decisions and continue to navigate the many unprecedented challenges caused by this pandemic.”

COVID-19 Resources for the Public

- [ATPE COVID-19 FAQ and Resource Page](#)
- [TeachTheVote.org](#)—ATPE’s educational advocacy blog
- [ATPE District of Innovation FAQ and Resource Page](#)

About the Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)

ATPE has been a strong voice for Texas educators since 1980. It is the leading educators’ association in Texas with approximately 100,000 members statewide. With its strong collaborative philosophy, ATPE speaks for classroom teachers, administrators, and future, retired, and para-educators and works to create better opportunities for Texas’ five million public school students. ATPE is the ally and the voice of Texas public education. | Learn more about ATPE at [atpe.org](#).