



Association of Texas
Professional Educators
305 E. Huntland Dr., Suite 300
Austin, TX 78752-3792

Phone: (512) 467-0071
Fax: (512) 467-2203
Email: info@atpe.org
Online: atpe.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 23, 2020

ATPE Statement on Texas Education Agency's Public Health Guidelines

State's largest educator association: TEA's draft guidance shows need for more work to provide the support schools need

AUSTIN, Texas—The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE), the state's largest association for educators, has reviewed **draft Texas Education Agency COVID-19 guidance for school districts** circulating in the media and issues the following statement:

Earlier today, ATPE reviewed a draft of what Texas Education Commissioner **Mike Morath** and TEA are calling the "Strong Start" plan—a framework for school districts to follow as they implement COVID-19 safety protocols to bring students and faculty back to school. The draft comes after the governor's announcement **last week that students and teachers would be back in classrooms this fall.**

While the Commissioner has pledged to release the final guidance in the coming days, it's clear from this draft that much is being left up to individual school districts to determine what works best for their local communities, with few state-level requirements beyond notice to parents and students of a district-adopted plan and protocol following a lab-confirmed case of COVID-19.

Considering this, ATPE strongly urges the state to require stronger actions to ensure the safety of school employees and Texas students. ATPE also asks school districts to listen to their employees and the recommendations of medical experts regarding the impact of the pandemic in their area as they implement their back-to-school safety protocols.

"Nothing in this guidance so far offers additional peace of mind for teachers, school district leaders, or parents," said **Shannon Holmes**, ATPE Executive Director. "Elected school boards and superintendents now face a difficult balancing act between preventing COVID-19 outbreaks and ensuring children are in the most productive learning environment possible—a physical classroom with an in-person teacher. They deserve to have support and actionable guidance from the state of Texas."

According to a just-concluded survey of ATPE's 2020 membership, more than 65% of ATPE members said their students were less engaged in learning when required to attend school virtually. This fact must be balanced with health and safety concerns, which are top-of-mind to a large portion of Texas educators, according to another **recent ATPE survey**, this one open to all Texas educators.

The COVID-19 Educator Impact Survey, which focused on educators' top concerns related to returning to campus during the pandemic, showed that more than 65% of the educators surveyed named the health and safety of students as a top concern.

Your Ally. Your Voice.

atpe.org

Sixty percent of respondents listed their personal health and safety, and more than 45% reported concern about student learning gaps and learning loss.

ATPE is committed to ensuring the success of Texas educators and public schools, especially during these uncertain times. In early March, ATPE launched a COVID-19 resource and FAQ page at www.atpe.org/coronavirus. The webpage, one of the first COVID-19 resource webpages directed specifically toward Texas educators, lists government resources, breaking news, self-care resources and tips, and a comprehensive FAQ with fact-checked answers to common questions on everything from district requirements, health and employment, and working with students.

In addition, ATPE staff have been engaged in daily communications with ATPE members, elected officials, agency staff, school district leaders, and other stakeholder groups to find solutions to the many challenges created by COVID-19. As an association representing approximately 100,000 educators across Texas, ATPE welcomes any opportunity to share input from our research with TEA as officials finalize their guidance.

“Given the current trends related to COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations, it is impossible to predict the public health situation in August 2020,” said Holmes. “What we at ATPE can guarantee is that we will be with our members each step of the way, helping individual members navigate concerns related to policy decisions in their districts and championing the tremendous contributions of educators as essential workers in this crisis.”

About the Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)

Founded in 1980, ATPE 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.org