

September 3, 2020

Mike Morath  
Commissioner  
Texas Education Agency  
1701 N. Congress Avenue  
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Commissioner Morath:

To gain a better understanding of the myriad issues facing schools this fall, the Texas Senate Democratic Caucus convened an education stakeholder task force comprised of local teachers, administrators, school board members, parents, child care providers and representatives from statewide organizations. Nearly 50 individuals and organizations shared their top concerns and their recommendations, which were further developed through subsequent virtual meetings of the task force. We include these recommendations below for your reference as you continue making decisions and setting parameters for schools this school year.

1. Decisions on reopening schools for in-person instruction should be made by local districts with meaningful input from parents, staff and other stakeholders, and using a rubric of objective criteria supplied by public health authorities.
2. The state should identify and secure all possible resources to assist specific schools and specific student populations that are disparately affected in developing and implementing COVID-19 plans that are developed locally based on individual district, campus and classroom conditions.
3. The state should maintain existing funding commitments under House Bill 3, while seeking greater flexibility and supplemental funding from state and federal resources to cover additional expenses entailed in mitigating COVID-19. Further, to ensure transparency, the state and all school districts should develop a report accounting federal funds that are being distributed.
4. The state should identify and address gaps in distance learning success by providing for learning devices, broadband internet access and parent/caregiver support to ensure all students have equitable access while learning from home.
5. The state should grant flexibility to districts and educators when necessary to allow them to meet the needs of their students and safeguard the health and safety of everyone on the school campus.
6. The state should support child care providers by ensuring the sustainability of funding streams including expending the available federal funding; facilitating partnerships with school districts, Head Start and corporations; and providing necessary resources to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

7. The state should seek the appropriate federal waivers to pause the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and the state's accountability system in favor of already existing, statistically-significant sampling to measure learning regression and help educators get students back on track.

8. The state should do everything possible to ensure the multitude of services provided by schools can continue in any learning configuration.

**Additional details for each recommendation are enclosed.** We recognize the enormously complex nature of Texas' return to school and hope this feedback from frontline educators and others directly interacting with our state's public school system can assist you in developing the policies that will ensure our children are educated safely and equitably in this difficult time. Should you have any questions about the recommendations in this letter or how we arrived at them, please feel free to contact us directly.

Thank you for your continued efforts on behalf of the students of Texas.

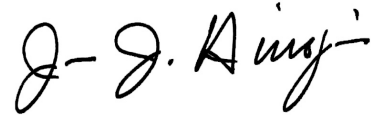
Sincerely,



Carol Alvarado  
Senate District 6



Sarah Eckhardt  
Senate District 14



Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa  
Senate District 20



Nathan Johnson  
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