



July 14, 2020

Dear Governor Abbott and Commissioner Morath,

The Bexar County Education Coalition (BCEC), which represents Bexar County area independent school districts (ISDs), sends our deep appreciation of the work and consistent communication of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) throughout this pandemic. The resources, support, and adjustments that have been made on behalf of and for our school communities have been multifaceted, complex, and comprehensive. Most of all, they have reflected the feedback of ISD personnel and the needs of educational communities on the ground. However, recently released guidance on how schools can and must open for the fall seems to be disconnected from the concerns of our educators and the needs of our students.

As we send this letter, Bexar County area hospitals are nearing capacity and new COVID-19 cases continue to increase significantly each day. The pandemic shows no signs of slowing or stopping in the near future and, as more days pass, more of our students, teachers, and administrators have personal experiences with loss of stability, income, and life from this horrendous virus.

Our schools' number one priority is providing the best education for all of their students, while ensuring their safety as well as the safety of their families and dedicated educators that surround them. To accomplish this monumental task, our school districts need flexibility and funding safeguards to maintain appropriate staffing levels, manage instructional modalities, and provide whole-child support that students so urgently need.

BCEC requests the following changes be made to the public health and funding guidelines:

- 1. School districts need the flexibility to determine appropriate instructional models that prioritize the safety of students, their families, and district employees without fear of losing funding for the 2020-2021 school year.** When school closures were extended on March 31, there were approximately 4,000 active cases across the entire state of Texas. Bexar County *alone* has approximately 13,000 active cases of the virus in our community today. Whether it is in-person classes, a hybrid model to limit the number of people on campus, or, if necessary, fully online, our school districts need to be able to determine the best approach for the needs and safety of their specific community given the continued health crisis. School districts should not be required to have a full five-day school week of in-person classes in order to receive funding when local health conditions reach crisis levels. At minimum, districts should have the flexibility to go fully online for the first nine weeks before gradually phasing in face-to-face instruction. By forcing districts to offer full-time in-person instruction, TEA has unintentionally placed our districts in the untenable position of choosing between safety and funding.
- 2. Average daily attendance (ADA) accounting rules need to be significantly adjusted for the coming school year to ensure educators focus on the needs of students and not on onerous attendance requirements.** Schools should be fully funded as they were in the spring, especially as the continued presence of the virus will make shut downs probable and instructional modalities fluid by necessity. Withholding critical funding from school districts will be detrimental to communities currently relying on critical support from schools. However, it would be understandable for TEA to require the tracking of student enrollment and engagement to determine the full scope of "COVID slide." At an absolute minimum TEA should set an ADA "floor" for the 2020-2021 school year. An ADA floor will ensure financial stability in spite of possible attendance loss for school districts as they finalize and implement budgets for the coming school year. Without an established ADA floor, districts may need to plan for staffing reductions and budget cuts after the school year begins and during a time when school support is needed more than ever.
- 3. School districts need more flexibility to implement strict mitigation protocols to help stop the spread of the virus without risking funding.** As mentioned above, school districts must have the ability to choose an instructional plan that fits the needs and concerns of their school community. Additionally, if a school district does have a reported case of COVID-19, there needs to be adequate time to close off and disinfect affected areas, contact the school community, and encourage testing of directly affected individuals if appropriate. Additionally,

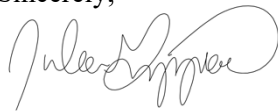
as per CDC and state guidelines, individuals who may have been exposed should quarantine for at least fourteen days to slow virus spread. Current TEA guidelines only give schools five consecutive days to react and reset from a report of a positive COVID case, which is insufficient. TEA regulations should instead match the state-level and CDC guidelines of at least fourteen days.

If the changes above are not addressed in a substantial way, our districts may need to make deep budget cuts and layoffs in the coming year, which will add to our already strained unemployment system as well as leave children across the state without critical educational support. Strong Texas schools are the backbone of the Lone Star State. As we continue to find our way through a pandemic, public education will be a driving force to help our state recover and a beacon of hope to build our resilience.

BCEC stands ready to answer any questions you may have or to partner with you to work through solutions.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests and your leadership during these difficult times.

Sincerely,



Julia Grizzard

Executive Director, Bexar County Education Coalition

On behalf of and in partnership with the follow Bexar County independent school districts:

Dr. Dana Bashara, Alamo Heights ISD
Dr. Kenneth Price, Boerne ISD
Roland Toscano, East Central ISD
Dr. Eduardo Hernandez, Edgewood ISD
Dr. Sherri Bays, Floresville ISD
Dr. Gary Bates, Fort Sam Houston ISD
Gerardo Soto, Harlandale ISD
Dr. Jeanette Ball, Judson ISD
Dr. Burnie Roper, Lackland ISD
Dr. Kenneth Rohrbach, Medina Valley ISD

Dr. Sean Maika, North East ISD
Dr. Brian T. Woods, Northside ISD
Dr. Brian Holt, Randolph Field ISD
Pedro Martinez, San Antonio ISD
Dr. Clark Ealy, Schertz-Cibilo-Universal City ISD
Dr. Saul Hinojosa, Somerset ISD
Dr. Marc Puig, South San Antonio ISD
Rolando Ramirez, Southside ISD
Dr. Lloyd Verstuyft, Southwest ISD

The above signers represent approximately 350,000 students, 60% of whom are economically disadvantaged, and lead suburban, urban, fast-growth, recapture, military, and rural independent school districts ranging in enrollment sizes from 1,000 to 100,000 students.

CC:

Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick
Speaker Dennis Bonnen
Representative Trey Martinez Fischer
Representative Steve Allison
Representative Diego Bernal
Representative Philip Cortez
Representative Barbara Gervin-Hawkins
Representative Roland Gutierrez

Representative Lyle Larson
Representative Ray Lopez
Representative Ina Minjarez
Representative Leo Pacheco
Senator Donna Campbell
Senator Pete Flores
Senator Jose Menendez
Senator Judith Zaffirini