

13450 Sunnyview Trails  
San Antonio, TX 78253  
(210) 334-1320

July 15, 2020

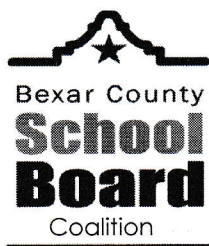
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 12428  
Austin, Texas 78711-2428

Dear Governor Abbott:

On behalf of the Bexar County School Board Coalition, we would like to first express our empathy with the challenges that we all face. As publicly elected officials, we know the difficulty that you and your staff face in weighing decisions in this time of great uncertainty. We know that gathering as much information from a variety of sources is critical for you to achieve the objectives identified in SY 20 – 21 Public Health Planning Guidance. As such, we are sending this letter to specify what we need as Board of Trustees to govern and oversee the management of school openings through this challenge.

As you know, the State's increase in the COVID-19 infections as well as the impact on the hospital systems the last two weeks have elevated public concerns and fear. In Bexar County, we are in an emergency state and our community is extremely nervous about schools opening in about another month. As Trustees, we realize that our communities are literally entrusting us with the lives of their students, teachers, district staff, and families. As of today, the Boards of Trustees in our area believe that the current State guidance restricts our flexibility, ability to adapt and the funding discretion needed to achieve the objectives of the Federal, State, and local school opening guidance. This letter is to identify the changes that will provide us with the authority and flexibility needed. Our requests are as follows:

1. **Allow Boards of Trustees to have the flexibility to govern the school openings of their districts. Specifically, Trustees need the flexibility to determine if and which of their schools can open, how and when online instruction can be provided, and the ability to define how to leverage hybrid approaches.** Some school districts may be able to hold school in person every day, others may need to use a hybrid approach that would have groups of students learning in school and from home on alternating days and others may need to provide at-home learning only for a period of time. Item 4 in the "Attendance and Enrollment" section of the planning guidance requires daily on-campus attendance for all students whose parents choose for them to be in a building. The mandatory nature of this clause impacts Board policies, funding, instructional decisions, staffing, facility maintenance, and other areas. This section should be modified to allow students to request but give the district the authority to determine what is feasible.
2. **Allow Boards of Trustees to determine any timelines associated with school openings so that they can quickly adapt to changing circumstances. Specifically, Trustees need the ability to determine the starting and length of time for the instructional options selected.** In our most vulnerable districts where the virus is currently rising at alarming rates, it may be necessary for these districts to function fully online for some significant periods of time during the year, particularly at the beginning of the school year. Item 5 in the "Attendance and Enrollment" section



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of the planning guidance allows schools a three-week transition process to begin on-campus instruction. We suggest that Boards be provided the authority to determine if they will have transition time periods for implementing different approaches and have the ability to adjust these timelines if conditions change. Therefore, the three-week time period or any other suggestions of designated time periods should be removed or extended greatly with a reevaluation period build in.

3. **Provide Boards of Trustees with the revenue and expenditure discretion to manage the districts' budgets. Specifically, Boards of Trustees request no loss in their revenue for the next budget cycle and reimbursement of additional expenditures resulting from COVID-19.** We concur with the Superintendent organizations that have requested a floor for average daily attendance (ADA) for next year. This would mean that no district would need to contemplate reductions in staffing or other budget cuts this fall at a time when students and their families will need more support from their schools than ever before. We also request full reimbursement of the costs to implement the Public Health challenges that have occurred and will continue to impact district budgets.
4. **Provide Boards of Trustees the ability to monitor and mitigate outbreaks in districts' by developing, facilitating and funding a robust "school-based testing" infrastructure.** This includes Covid-19 symptom screening, testing, contact tracing, and isolation. Districts do not have the resources or the expertise to do this work themselves, but students and teachers must be able to easily access a test by contacting the school with the results of the test being sent directly to the school district in real time so optimal, time-sensitive, data-driven decisions can be made by districts.

On behalf of the Bexar County School Board Coalition, we thank you for considering our requests. The Coalition membership consists of the 20 Independent School District Trustees in the San Antonio area. Our 380,000 students represent the rich diversity of the State in terms of our geography and demographics.

In summary, as Trustees, we are working closely with our Superintendents, district staff, community and families to prepare for school openings. We understand the impact of students not being able to attend school in person. We have a very short time to perform our duties to prepare for school openings and we need additional flexibility in order to make the best decisions both with regard to teaching and learning as well as the safety of our students and staff. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R Blount Jr".

Robert Blount, Jr.  
President