



July 9, 2020

Dear Governor Abbott,

The Texas School Alliance (TSA) and the Texas Urban Council of Superintendents (TUC) – representing almost 40% of all the students in Texas – have greatly appreciated the ongoing dialogue between Commissioner Morath and superintendents. Commissioner Morath has made himself and his staff available continually for school leaders across the state and has addressed many complex concerns. We appreciate and value the opportunity to provide input into the Texas Education Agency’s decision-making process regarding the response to the pandemic; however, the recent decisions regarding funding for school attendance and the hold harmless provisions are of grave concern to our schools. As you know, conditions ***have changed so drastically in the last four weeks***, particularly in our metropolitan areas. The State has had to reconsider many of the initial findings regarding the re-opening of businesses, companies and restaurants. Districts and their communities are facing the same worsening conditions, and these recent circumstances are far more acute than when school districts across the state were closed initially this past spring.

Unfortunately, school districts face significant uncertainty as they attempt to construct the budgets necessary to handle the crisis. A key element in creating a more stable budget environment is establishing rules for attendance and funding that will allow districts to plan for next year *without fear of significant loss in funding*. In accordance to state law, school districts already have entered into contracts with teachers for the 2020-2021. To that end, we request the following:

1. Direct the Commissioner of Education to waive student attendance accounting requirements the 2020/2021 school year to ensure school districts receive funding for students who are learning at home due to school closures. This is exactly what was done in the spring. **Now that health conditions are significantly more volatile, we encourage the state to respond in the same manner** and ensure districts do not experience loss in funding while dealing with intermittent school closures. The number of students that will be in remote instructional environments will undoubtedly be significant and the burdensome attendance accounting will be difficult for teachers and staff.
2. Set a floor for average daily attendance (ADA) for next year. An ADA floor will provide the greatest level of certainty and stability at this critical juncture. We recommend not allowing ADA for any district to fall below the final ADA count for the 2019-2020 school 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.
3. Allow school districts the flexibility to design instructional systems that meet the needs of families and staff given local health conditions. Some school districts may be able to hold school in person every day, but others may need to use a hybrid approach that would have groups of students learning in school and from home on alternating days. In our most vulnerable districts where the virus is currently spreading at alarming rates, it may be necessary for districts to be fully online for some significant periods of time during the year. Certainly, we all want students to be in

school but local school districts must have the flexibility to make sure that any approach taken is safe for students, staff, and families without the fear of losing funding. We encourage Texas to allow school systems to begin the 2020-2021 school year with full online learning for students for a minimum of the first six- or nine-week grading period without state aid reduction.

As you undoubtedly know, school districts are the largest employers and the largest consumers in many counties/cities across Texas. As you work to put the economy of Texas back on its feet, school districts play a critical role in that healthy economic outlook. Loss of funding will have significant impact on local economies and will be counter-productive to all the work you have been doing.

School districts are busy preparing to bring students safely back to school in the fall. This includes creating new instructional delivery systems to serve students safely in person and at home when in person instruction is not possible or safe. This need has the potential to change nearly everything about how school districts do business, including constructing new staffing models, reworking transportation systems, retraining staff, and making sure students and staff have access to needed technology. We have roughly four to six weeks to accomplish this work before school is scheduled to begin.

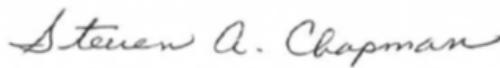
Again, we appreciate your efforts to safely re-open Texas. Texas School Alliance and Texas Urban Council districts are working hard to ensure that our schools re-open safely, as well. To do so, Texas school districts need clarity and predictability by July 17th.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Respectfully,



Dr. Kent P. Scribner
Fort Worth ISD Superintendent
TUC Chair



Dr. Steve Chapman
HEB ISD Superintendent
TSA President



Dr. Michael Hinojosa
Dallas ISD Superintendent
TSA & TUC Legislative Chair

The **Texas School Alliance (TSA)** comprises 40 of Texas' largest school districts, serving over 2 million students or nearly 40 percent of the state's total pupil enrollment. Our students represent 44 percent of the state's economically disadvantaged student population, 52 percent of its English Language Learners, and 45 percent of all at-risk students in the state. The organization works on issues that will improve educational quality for Texas students, particularly those in large and urban districts. <http://texasschoolalliance.org/>

TSA Member Districts: Abilene ISD, Aldine ISD, Alief ISD, Amarillo ISD, Arlington ISD, Austin ISD, Corpus Christi ISD, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, Dallas ISD, Ector County ISD, El Paso ISD, Fort Bend ISD, Fort Worth ISD, Garland ISD, Harlingen CISD, Houston ISD, Humble ISD, Hurst-Euless-Bedford ISD, Irving ISD, Katy ISD, Killeen ISD, Lubbock ISD, McAllen ISD, Mesquite ISD, Midland ISD, North East ISD, Northside ISD, Pasadena ISD, Pflugerville ISD, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, Plano ISD, Richardson ISD, Round Rock ISD, San Angelo ISD, San Antonio ISD, Socorro ISD, Spring Branch ISD, Tyler ISD, United ISD, and Waco ISD.

The **Texas Urban Council of Superintendents (TUC)** is the pre-eminent voice for traditional urban public schools. The Council meets regularly, focusing on governmental relations, governance, school turnaround, leadership development, human capital management, college access for urban youth, second language learning and many other shared interests. Member districts are unique because their students not only face issues related to generational poverty but, as mostly namesake districts, they also deal with significant media scrutiny.

TUC Member Districts: Aldine ISD, Austin ISD, Brownsville ISD, Corpus Christi ISD, Dallas ISD, El Paso ISD, Fort Worth ISD, Houston ISD, San Antonio ISD, and Ysleta ISD.