



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

July 14, 2020

Dear Gov. Abbott and Commissioner Morath:

ATPE writes to you on behalf of the approximately 100,000 educators we represent who have shared concerns with us about the reopening of schools and the challenges they and their students will face during the 2020-21 school year. We are enclosing new and updated recommendations for state and local policies related to COVID-19 that we urge you to consider.

Chief among our recommendations are the following:

Health and safety should drive the decisions around when and how to reopen schools. ATPE's governing body, our House of Delegates, adopted two resolutions July 9 related to dealing with the pandemic in the 2020-21 school year. The first resolution calls for delaying the reopening of schools until a "flattening of the curve" can be demonstrated. This echoes educator feedback to us in recent surveys in which the health and safety of students has been cited as educators' No. 1 concern about returning to school, followed by concerns about their own health and safety.

Educators, non-administrative school staff, and parents must have a seat at the table when state and local COVID-19 policies are developed and implemented. We are dismayed by reports of local school districts announcing their reopening plans without having consulted local educators other than administrators. The same holds true at the state level, where educator associations have been excluded from many of the discussions with superintendents about what accommodations and guidance are needed for next year.

Flexibility is key. ATPE recognizes that the pandemic has not affected every Texas community uniformly and that a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to succeed. However, we believe the state has a responsibility to ensure that local plans for reopening meet certain minimal criteria to prevent and mitigate the further spread of COVID-19 within our schools. We are proposing the adoption of a state reopening framework based upon objective, quantifiable measures that can be used to allow local school districts to open in a gradual manner upon satisfying these health-based criteria.

The ATPE House of Delegates is also calling for cancellation of STAAR and TELPAS for the 2020-21 school year. Some testing may be necessary to assess and diagnose students' needs following the disruptions COVID-19 has caused within the school setting, and we know there will be learning gaps that much be remediated quickly to get students back on track. However, classroom teachers are best positioned to diagnose and prescribe assistance for these students. ATPE believes the high-stakes nature of STAAR and TELPAS will place additional, unnecessary pressure on our students, parents, and educators at a time when they are facing tremendous

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challenges. We also question whether such tests can produce data that will be valid and reliable considering the monumental changes that have already occurred.

We welcome any opportunity to discuss these recommendations in greater detail with you or to provide additional input to you or your staff. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shannon Holmes', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Shannon Holmes, Ed.D.
Executive Director

CC: Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick
House Speaker Dennis Bonnen
Chairman Dan Huberty
Chairman Larry Taylor