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ATPE: State should learn from El Paso COVID-19 spike and proactively provide guidance to schools statewide

With cases on the rise, now is the time to act; school districts, educators, and parents deserve to know what options are on the table should a “hot spot” emerge in their community

AUSTIN, Texas—The [Association of Texas Professional Educators](http://atpe.org) (ATPE) is calling on Texas Education Commissioner **Mike Morath** to take proactive steps to ensure school districts have direction in case of further COVID-19 spikes like that currently seen in El Paso.

Following pleas from El Paso-area superintendents and elected officials facing a dramatic increase of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations, TEA recently released revised area-specific guidance for resuming in-person instruction, titled “The Region 19 School Safe Zones Plan.”

On Nov. 2, the state’s largest educator association shared with the commissioner a letter outlining revisions to the Region 19 plan that, if implemented statewide, could proactively help school districts as additional “hot spot” regions emerge.

After reviewing the Region 19 School Safe Zones Plan, ATPE appreciates that TEA is finally attempting to tie provision of in-person instruction to an objective, health-based metric, but believes that room for improvement exists and is necessary.

ATPE recommends that TEA refine and expand the flexibility of the Region 19 plan in the following ways:

- The definition of “priority students” in the plan should clarify which students are included and should **only** address instructional needs. It should not include non-instructional and highly subjective considerations such as access to childcare.
- The 20% “Red Zone” threshold is higher than the governor’s own cut point of 15% for potential business restrictions. ATPE recommends the “Red Zone” cut point be no higher than 15%.
- **Finally, the revised plan should be applied statewide so that such flexibility can be utilized by any district in the state if-and-when it is confronted with a surge of COVID-19 cases.**

“As a professional association representing nearly 100,000 educators statewide, we understand the very real challenges school districts are facing,” said ATPE Executive Director Shannon Holmes, Ed.D. “We believe that providing this flexibility to all school districts is a necessary first step toward keeping our schools safe amid this crisis. The state leadership should be providing all districts with the guidance necessary to do what’s best for their communities.”

[The full letter is available to read here.](#) In addition to the recommendations related to the TEA plan, the letter also calls upon TEA to act to ensure the compliance of all school districts to state law and their own reporting requirements.

About the Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)

Founded in 1980, ATPE is the leading educators’ association in Texas with approximately 100,000 members statewide. With its strong collaborative philosophy, ATPE speaks for classroom teachers, administrators, and future, retired, and para-educators and works to create better opportunities for Texas’ five million public school students. | atpe.org

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