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For Immediate Release

November 18, 2020

Texas Educators Find Themselves in an “Impossible Situation,” Worried about Health and Increasing Workloads—and Lacking Trust in State Officials’ Response

State’s largest educator association releases results and analysis of COVID-19 impact surveys

AUSTIN, Texas—Educators find themselves in an “impossible situation” as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to ravage the state of Texas and are increasingly dissatisfied with state and district leadership’s handling of the crisis, according to findings by the [Association of Texas Professional Educators](http://atpe.org) (ATPE).

On Nov. 18, ATPE released a 14-page analysis of three educator-focused surveys designed to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Texas public education. The report, titled “[An Impossible Situation: Why Texas Educators Are Struggling to Serve Students During COVID-19—and Pathways State and District Leaders Can Follow to Correct the Course](#),” breaks down the results of three complementary surveys conducted by ATPE between May-October 2020 of both member and non-member educators. In total, the surveys received 6,922 responses.

Most respondents expressed that the health and safety needs of students, faculty, and staff are a top concern. The amount of mental stress and anxiety educators are experiencing in the return to school this semester is at an all-time high. Respondents expressed fear for their lives, depression, and a feeling that teachers “were an afterthought” in the COVID-19 back-to-school planning processes at the state and district levels. Some shared that the implementations of safety protocols by their districts were, in their words, “inconsistent.”

In response to ATPE’s September survey, one educator wrote: “Teachers are having panic attacks, breakdowns, and feeling inadequate, [and] overwhelmed,” just as the school year was ramping up. Several noted that conditions were causing even veteran educators to leave or consider leaving the profession.

In addition, the responses showed that between May and October, educators began experiencing concerns about increasing workloads. In the October survey, 85% of respondents said their work hours had increased; 53% attributed the increase to the extra planning necessary in the current educational environment.

It should come as no surprise, then, that educators are expressing dissatisfaction with state and district leadership. More than 75% of respondents were “unsatisfied” or “very unsatisfied” (41%) with state leadership’s handling of the crisis. Educators feel as though their districts’ hands are often tied by the state’s insistence on tying in-person learning to the Texas Education Agency (TEA)’s funding mechanism.

“Many respondents felt district and state-level COVID-19 policies weren’t designed with educators in mind,” said **Andrea Chevalier**, ATPE lobbyist and author of the report. “This leads to impractical and unreasonable job expectations and extreme stress. Educators are concerned with students’ overall well-being and success, of course, but they believe that in-person instruction must be safe, well-resourced, and effective.”

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As the name of the report implies, however, the surveys also offer indications of pathways state and district leaders can take to increase the number of educators who feel safe on campus and ensure a more effective teaching and learning environment. Some positive responses to the surveys indicate that certain districts are, in fact, navigating the pandemic successfully largely due to clear, transparent communication that involves educators in the process.

Based on the results and analysis of the surveys, ATPE shares the following recommendations:

1. Educators should be included in school districts' COVID-19 planning.
2. Districts should be transparent and consistent about COVID-19 policies and their enforcement across all school programs, including maintaining a confidential, trustworthy line of communication between employees and district leaders.
3. Class sizes should be limited to enhance the effectiveness of physical distancing in mitigating the spread of the virus.
4. The state should ensure districts have adequate cleaning supplies and PPE.
5. The state should provide resources, such as funding for substitute teachers, custodial staff, and additional teachers, to ensure districts can accommodate increased staffing needs to relieve educators from extra duties, both during the pandemic and after when students have increased learning needs.
6. Districts should ensure educators who need medical accommodations are being appropriately served under applicable federal law, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act.
7. The state should not tie district funding to a requirement for in-person instruction and should instead allow districts to make the best decisions for their communities.
8. Educators' mental health must be prioritized through all policy decisions, including providing funding that affects staffing levels and the ability of districts to allow educators to focus on a reasonable workload.
9. To reduce the risk of viral spread and alleviate fears of exposure, the state should reconsider current standardized testing requirements that will increase the number of students required to be on campus for testing days.

Read the full report [here](#).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ATPE in March launched the first Texas education-focused COVID-19 webpage. The page includes a comprehensive FAQ, important news, and resources for educators and parents. Learn more at www.atpe.org/coronavirus.

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