

December 14, 2020

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor of Texas
1100 San Jacinto Blvd
Austin, TX 78701

Dear Governor Abbott:

The 23 undersigned organizations appreciate the tireless work and countless hours you have spent in leading the state during this global pandemic over the past nine months. Additionally, we appreciate the waivers that were granted during the 2019-20 school year that provided continued funding for school districts that moved to remote instruction while brick and mortar schools were closed.

The first semester of the 2020-21 school year is almost complete, and unfortunately, the state is experiencing another surge in COVID cases. While a vaccine will soon be available, not everyone will have immediate access to it. Ensuring the health and safety of 5.4 million students and more than 600,000 staff members has been of paramount concern for school districts across the state since the pandemic began.

For school districts to continue to serve students and staff through the second half of this school year, assurance from the state that districts will receive sustained ADA funding is critical. Under current TEA guidelines, there is no such assurance for sustained funding past the first 18 weeks of the school year. School districts across the state have experienced extreme declines in student enrollment during the first semester and school leaders anticipate the same during the upcoming spring semester until the virus is slowed and the majority of Texans are vaccinated.

If enrollment declines continue after the first 18 weeks, school district funding is in jeopardy, and the ability to continue to serve students will suffer. Budget cuts will be inevitable resulting in the layoff of some teachers and other essential school personnel at the worst possible time. Educators and other school staff members have put their lives on the line to keep schools open. The least we can do is protect their jobs and provide the resources they need to serve our students in a crisis.

In a recent press release in which Commissioner of Education Mike Morath announced a pause in the A-F accountability ratings for this school year, he acknowledged that the pandemic has disrupted operations in fundamental ways that have often been outside the control of our school leaders. We agree with the Commissioner's statement, and add that the fluctuations in student attendance during this school year due to the pandemic have also largely been outside the control of school leaders. To financially penalize school districts for attendance declines during this pandemic runs counter to the Commissioner's recognition of the reality of what is happening across the state.

Respectfully, we urge you to extend the provision in TEA guidance that provides assurances of 100 percent of ADA funding for the remaining 18 weeks of the 2020-21 school year for both virtual and in-person learning. In addition, we strongly recommend that TEA guidance include a floor for ADA that does not allow any school district to fall below their final ADA count for the 2019-20 school year. Any realistic timeline of legislative action on this matter would be too late and past the time when districts would be forced to make budget cuts.

The undersigned organizations appreciate your time and attention to this very important matter. Please feel free to contact Amy Beneski (TASA), 512-852-2115 if you have any questions or need additional information or clarification on the issues and recommendations above.

Sincerely,

Texas Association of School Administrators	Texas Association of School Boards
Raise Your Hand Texas	Texas Association of Community Schools
Texas Association of Rural Schools	Texas Association of Midsize Schools
Texas School Alliance	Texas Rural Education Association
Texas School Coalition	Texas Classroom Teachers Association
Texas Association of School Business Officials	Fast Growth School Coalition
Texas Elementary Principals & Supervisors Assoc.	Texas AFT
Texas PTA	South Texas Association of Schools
Texas Urban Council	Texas State Teachers Association
Association of Texas Professional Educators	Moak Casey & Associates
The Equity Center	Bexar County Education Coalition
Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education	

cc: Gov. Dan Patrick, Lieutenant Governor, Texas
Speaker Dennis Bonnen, Texas House
Sen. Larry Taylor, Chair, Senate Education Committee
Sen. Jane Nelson, Chair, Senate Finance Committee
Rep. Dan Huberty, Chair, House Public Education Committee
Rep. Giovanni Capriglione, Chair, House Appropriations Committee
Mike Morath, Commissioner of Education