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**The Association of Texas Professional Educators calls for moratorium on educator evaluations for 2019-20 school year**

*The COVID-19 pandemic, campus disruptions could jeopardize administration of evaluation efforts, says state's largest educator association*

**AUSTIN, Texas—The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)**, the largest educator association in Texas, is urging the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and Commissioner Mike Morath to issue a state moratorium on the teacher and principal appraisal systems for the 2019-20 school year in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

ATPE [recently wrote to Commissioner Morath and the TEA](#) asking for the agency to direct districts to refrain from administering this year's Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) and the Teacher Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS) requirements.

"The profession we proudly represent has responded with quick action, determination, and passion to keep students learning despite the crisis at hand," wrote **Shannon Holmes**, ATPE Executive Director, in the April 2 letter. "Although we are aware TEA has conveyed to school officials the availability of waivers of certain aspects of appraisal requirements, we believe more expansive action is necessary to prevent negative consequences in the short and long term."

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures, teachers and administrators across the state have had to make sudden, dramatic shifts to the way they practice their profession. ATPE believes that the stay-in-place orders and switch to distance learning that many teachers and administrators are contending with at present would not allow for authentic observation or evaluation of their teaching practices.

"The campus disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic have forced teachers and administrators to shift their focus to ensuring continuity of learning through rapidly assembled and deployed distance learning resources," said Holmes. "In our view, this radical change in priorities, coupled with uncertainty over the circumstances of the next few months for our schools and communities, jeopardizes successful administration of evaluations with fidelity this school year."

The T-TESS and T-PESS are often used locally to determine compensation and eligibility for incentive payments. Appraisals factor into decisions about hiring, contract renewals, and firing. Some ATPE members worry that the current crisis and its likely impact on the state's finances could prompt some school districts to make personnel cuts based on incomplete appraisal data. In addition, the Teacher Incentive Allotment—created when House Bill 3 passed—requires participating districts to use "teacher observation and student growth data to determine which

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teachers qualify for designations” that would qualify the district for additional funding, which cannot be done under the current circumstances.

“Even under normal conditions, opportunities for authentic observation of an educator’s teaching practices are limited,” said Holmes. “Observation is critical to obtaining a complete and accurate picture of an educator’s strengths and weaknesses, and the lack of meaningful opportunities for such observations under current conditions is even more acute. These are extraordinary circumstances, and we cannot expect ordinary outcomes, even in the context of educator evaluations.”

Holmes praised state officials’ responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as waiving administration of the 2019-20 State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) tests and announcing that neither schools nor districts would receive A-F grades this year.

“[We] recognize and appreciate the swift response taken by the Texas Education Agency and Gov. Greg Abbott to address the education system’s changing needs under these unusual circumstances and provide much-needed flexibility,” said Holmes.

ATPE has long advocated for robust, interactive appraisals, but ATPE also believes that , Texas school districts will be unable to accurately and reliably complete the appraisal process this year in a manner that meets standards necessary to ensure confidence in the system and its integrity.

ATPE hopes that the TEA and Commissioner Morath will issue a directive to school districts to halt the administration of incomplete teacher or principal evaluations during the current school year in order to preserve the validity of the evaluation system and the many programs linked to it.

Holmes said: “Many [ATPE] members are now juggling professional responsibilities with new personal childcare requirements. Many educators’ families also face significant economic hardships related to spousal job loss during the pandemic. Our hardworking educators fear proceeding with evaluations during the current crisis will take focus away from the already daunting task of keeping the educational environment as intact as possible for students.”

Read the full letter [here](#).

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### **About the Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)**

ATPE has been a strong voice for Texas educators since 1980. It 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 is the ally and the voice of Texas public education. | Learn more about ATPE at [atpe.org](http://atpe.org).