



**Texas Senate Democratic Caucus**  
**Education Stakeholder Task Force Recommendations**  
September 3, 2020

**1. Decisions on reopening schools for in-person instruction should be made by local districts with meaningful input from parents, staff and other stakeholders and using a rubric of objective criteria supplied by public health authorities.**

- Schools closed under these rubrics should continue to be funded for distance learning.
- Processes for making decisions on reopening must be made in close consultation with and with meaningful input from public health officials, staff and parents.
- Decision-making processes and the data used to make decisions must be transparent for parents, staff and the community.
- The state should provide all needed information to districts.
- If a school develops a phased reopening policy, students with additional instructional needs (e.g., younger children, children with limited connectivity at home, students with special needs, English Learners) should be prioritized.

**2. The state should identify and secure all possible resources to assist specific schools and specific student populations that are disparately affected in developing and implementing COVID-19 plans that are developed locally based on individual district, campus and classroom conditions.**

- Mitigation policies must be developed in a way that considers student age, special needs and underlying health conditions.
- The state should seek out and disseminate best practices from schools, child care providers and other entities that have been successful in mitigating COVID-19.
- The state should ensure all schools and child care providers have the resources they need to carry out their COVID-19 mitigation plans including providing sufficient resources for addressing ventilation and other physical building infrastructure needs.
- Plans should include all aspects of school life such as classrooms, hallways, transportation, meal service, extracurricular activities, before/after school programming and the needs of any students still participating in distance learning.

**3. The state should maintain existing funding commitments under House Bill 3, while seeking greater flexibility and supplemental funding from state and federal resources to cover additional expenses entailed in mitigating COVID-19. Further, to ensure transparency, the state and all school districts should develop a report accounting federal funds that are being distributed.**

- The state should cover the costs of districts' COVID mitigation efforts, as discussed above, as well as additional expenses such as increased use of substitute teachers, compensatory education for students with special needs and others and increased operating costs (e.g., for school meal and transportation programs).
- The state should seek additional flexibility and funding from the federal government to the extent possible including the waivers for school accountability and congregate feeding programs necessary to carry out the other recommendations in this list.
- The state should grant flexibility for districts seeking to maximize state funding including a waiver allowing reimbursement for school bus meal and academic material (packet) deliveries and the expansion of allowable uses for the school safety allotment.
- The state should identify sources of funding to maintain the funding gains from House Bill 3 including additional federal funding and the Economic Stabilization Fund, if necessary.
- The state should continue pandemic funding for child care, as detailed below.

**4. The state should identify and address gaps in distance learning success by providing for learning devices, broadband internet access and parent/caregiver support to ensure all students have equal access while learning from home.**

- The state should gather and analyze data about geographic and economic gaps in internet availability and ensure the results of this analysis are publicly available.
- The state should allocate or seek all necessary resources to close the gaps identified in the above analysis.
- The state should negotiate for low broadband service rates to increase connectivity.
- The state should identify and promulgate best practices for stopgap measures to include students with no current reliable internet service (including the use of mobile/bus hotspots and learning center models).
- The state should collect and analyze data on virtual student engagement, disaggregated by students' race/ethnicity, economically disadvantaged status, English learner status and receipt of special education services.
- The state should identify and promulgate strategies for engaging students in distance format including strategies for overcoming barriers to distance learning among disadvantaged groups (e.g., students from low socio-economic status families, students in special education, English Learners).

**5. The state should grant flexibility to districts and educators when necessary to allow them to meet the needs of their students and safeguard the health and safety of everyone on the school campus.**

- The state should encourage districts to leverage remote work to the extent possible to decrease in-person interactions in school.
- The state should clarify that mandated self-quarantine as required by state and local guidance does not count against paid sick days.
- The state should provide educators with training in COVID-19 mitigation protocols and distance learning.
- The state should provide temporary flexibility under current laws governing hiring, resignation and retired educators returning to work to provide reasonable accommodations for the health and safety of staff while helping districts meet their staffing needs.

**6. The state should support child care providers by ensuring the sustainability of funding streams including expending the available federal funding; facilitating partnerships with school districts, Head Start and corporations; and providing necessary resources to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.**

- The state should maximize the availability of child care by continuing emergency programs and leveraging existing resources including:
  - expending the remaining \$171 million in CARES Act funding for child care;
  - expanding federal relief fund eligibility to child care providers who do not have contracts with Local Workforce Boards; and
  - reinstating the Texas Workforce Commission program that provides child care subsidies for parents who are essential workers and expand it to include low-income workers.
- The state should provide for child care providers' COVID-19 mitigation efforts including PPE, cleaning supplies and services and access to substitutes.
- The state should provide funding for increased staffing and rental space necessitated by CDC guidelines and to maintain safe learning environments.
- The state should include child care providers in its connectivity efforts, as detailed above.
- The state should maintain support for existing on-campus before/after school programs to minimize the need to transport students on these campuses between locations.

**7. The state should seek the appropriate federal waivers to pause the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and the state's accountability system in favor of already existing, statistically-significant sampling to measure learning regression and help educators get students back on track.**

- The state should pause the state accountability system and any other systems based on STAAR results, including the T-TESS teacher appraisal system, for the 2020-2021 school year.
- In addition, funds that are utilized for the administration of the test (approx.. \$83 million) should be reallocated towards schools during the pandemic.
- If the STAAR is administered, then it should be used only for informational purposes and not to evaluate the performance of students, teachers, individual schools, or districts.
- Teachers should use results of these tests to determine the need for remedial instruction including compensatory education for students in special education.

**8. The state should do everything possible to ensure the multitude of services provided by schools can continue in any learning configuration.**

- The state should provide guidance for completing as much of CTE "hands-on" requirements as possible in a way that complies with social distancing
- Special education laws are still in effect; districts must make concerted effort to provide proper accommodations and convene ARD meetings as necessary.
- The state should seek all possible flexibility in meal distribution protocols to allow for meals to-go or for delivery when school buildings are not open for instruction.
- The state should grant waivers to allow reimbursement for bus mileage to perform other needed tasks, such as meal/packet delivery, use as an internet hotspot or for traveling nurses.