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ATPE: “School districts need flexibility without additional strings from TEA”

Largest Texas educator association again urges use of health-related criteria to guide data-driven decisions on returning to campus

AUSTIN, Texas—The Texas Education Agency (TEA) announced today that it would provide Texas school districts an additional six-week extension to its minimum funding guarantee—as long as the districts offer in-person instruction to families that request it. The [Association of Texas Professional Educators](#) (ATPE)—the largest educators’ association in Texas—is grateful for the extension but believes that TEA is inserting itself into the role of a qualified health authority by tying this much-needed funding to being open for 100% in-person education.

“Since schools have opened around the country, the percentage of new COVID-19 cases in the school-aged population has increased, [according to a recent report by the American Academy of Pediatrics](#),” said ATPE Senior Lobbyist **Monty Exter**. “Just last week, TEA itself recognized that there are currently existing COVID-19 hotspots in Texas that warrant a delay in returning to in-person classes.”

The AAP report indicated that children of all ages currently make up 10% of all cases in the U.S., which is up from only 2% in April.

On Sept. 24, TEA announced revised guidelines indicating it would take local health conditions in “COVID-19 danger zones”—for instance, the Rio Grande Valley, Laredo, and Victoria—into “consideration” should school boards in those areas seek additional weeks of virtual learning beyond the eight weeks currently allowed. The Oct. 1 messaging seemingly undercuts that messaging by suggesting that districts hit hardest by the pandemic might be denied necessary funding.

ATPE has repeatedly expressed the opinion that local districts—with the advice of qualified health professionals—should determine the speed at which to increase in-person capacity. This flexibility provides districts with the opportunity to safely bring back students who are in most need of an in-person environment without putting them at the risk inherent in a 100% capacity mandate. School districts should not be unnecessarily financially penalized for making decisions to protect the health and safety of their local populations.

“It’s obvious that all educators have a desire to get back into the classrooms and resume normal instruction as soon as health and safety permit,” said Exter. “But that’s contingent on a number of factors unique to each region. Pressure of any sort from TEA and the state is not necessary or helpful and serves only to potentially heighten the risk to local populations.”

ATPE Urges Use of Objective, Health-Created Criteria and Empowerment of Local Control

- Recognizing that COVID-19 does not affect Texas uniformly, ATPE has long urged the use of objective health-related criteria to guide local decisions on reopening school facilities. For months, the association has offered recommendations to state officials and school district leaders ([readable here](#)) that stress the importance of local control in making these decisions, with special attention paid to local health data, as well as the input of medical experts, school staff, and parents of students.

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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