

November 20, 2020

Mr. Mike Morath
Commissioner
Texas Education Agency
Austin, Texas

Dear Commissioner Morath:

As a coalition of leading school superintendents educating over 10% of Texas students, major business chambers of commerce representing over 40% of the state's GDP, and statewide education advocates, we are collectively reaching out to share our views and requests on two very important and timely topics during the current pandemic – state assessments and accountability.

- We believe strongly in understanding where Texas students are in their learning journey and in using common assessment data to inform strategies and resourcing, particularly with respect to identifying students for targeted interventions (such as HB3-funded summer learning) who have suffered COVID-relative learning loss. We also believe that common assessments foster continuous improvement and innovation by informing better understanding of relative performance among various districts operating within virtual, hybrid and in-person learning environments. Common assessment data provides an opportunity to learn from each other, which is critical to overcoming the challenges COVID has presented.
- We think it is critical for government leaders and policy makers to fully understand the extent and the disproportionate nature of COVID-19 learning loss that has likely occurred for our communities from limited income homes and our communities of color as they are asked to make critical and equitable resourcing and policy decisions for our state's 5.4 million children in K-12.

For these two reasons, we strongly believe that Texas as a state should keep the 2021 STAAR administration assessment.

- Second, we also firmly believe that school districts should be accountable to parents and taxpayers for the significant amount of state and local funding invested in the children of Texas. While we all may have varying degrees of suggested improvements to the current A-F system, we all agree that a strong accountability system is important in providing stakeholders with a transparent, differentiated view of the academic performance of campuses and districts across Texas in normal times.
- **However, for obvious reasons, these are not normal times.** Disproportionate internet access and the inability for districts to adequately connect to all of our state's students, combined with varying parental concerns over the safety of in-person learning (which is proving to be more effective than virtual learning) coupled with urgent social-emotional needs will make it almost impossible to assign A-F ratings in a fair and equitable way.
- **As a result, we respectfully request that academic accountability for school and district ratings be placed on pause for the 2020-21 school year, and that superintendents and school leaders are given this information as soon as possible.** Given the disruption and uncertainty of COVID, we need to provide the necessary space that our educators need to put students' physical and mental health first. In addition, the student growth and progress measures of the academic accountability system will be crucial towards recognizing the hard work that our educators are doing and will continue to do to bridge the learning loss gap. Therefore, when academic accountability returns in the 2021-2022 school year, academic achievement, growth and progress must remain components of the system. Importantly, to strategically target resources and needed remediation, we must be able to clearly understand how much students know. The student achievement, growth and gap closing measures will help to guide both efforts in the classroom and system efforts across our districts.

In summary, while we appreciate TEA's commitment to fair assessment and support resuming assessment exams for the 2020-2021 school year in order to provide a benchmark to determine where students are in

their learning and to determine the extent of COVID related learning loss, we nevertheless believe that student, school and district accountability measures linked to testing should be suspended for this year.

These are unprecedeted times in our country. We sincerely laud the spirit and extraordinary efforts exhibited across the state to ensure that Texas students' health and academic interests are prioritized as we navigate these unchartered waters. We very much appreciate the state's leadership during these difficult times, and we look forward to continued collaboration as we collectively recover from this pandemic. Our students' and Texas' economic futures depend on it.

Respectfully,

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Dr. Jeannie Stone
Superintendent, Richardson ISD

Dr. Ricardo Lopez
Superintendent, Garland ISD

Dr. David Vroonland
Superintendent, Mesquite ISD

Dr. Linda Ellis
Superintendent, Grand Prairie ISD

Dr. D'Andre Weaver
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Dr. Magda Hernandez
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