



Support for HB 164

Allowing district face covering policies

August 30, 2021

As the largest educator association in Texas, the **Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)** appreciates this opportunity to provide input on **House Bill (HB) 164**, allowing districts to adopt local face covering policies. **ATPE believes districts should have the authority to set local face covering requirements to respond to local conditions in their service to students, staff, and the community.**

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and U.S. Department of Education (ED) recommend that children of all grade levels should return to in-person instruction for the 2021-22 school year. Additionally, because children under 12 are currently ineligible for immunization, the AAP and the CDC recommend universal masking in schools. U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona also recently expressed public support for Texas school districts' ability to require masks, and ED released guidance recommending universal masking to appropriately serve and protect students with disabilities.

In August 2021, ATPE conducted a survey of its educator members that garnered over 3,500 respondents spanning the entire state of Texas. When asked who should determine masking policies for students and staff, the number one response was the local school district. Nearly 90% of respondents did not believe that the Governor or TEA should have the authority to determine masking policies in schools.

Educators have taught in pandemic conditions for over a year and have students' best interests in mind. **ATPE supports local control and believes the state should give school district leaders the ability to implement policies that are suitable for local conditions and will promote the safety and academic success of their school communities, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

HB 164 provides school districts and charter schools with the ability to set local face covering requirements to reduce the spread of infectious, contagious, and communicable diseases. However, the bill would not require a local school district to develop a face covering policy if district trustees do not believe such a policy is necessary. **ATPE supports HB 164 and simply suggests that a provision be included to allow for exemptions as deemed appropriate.** Some students and staff may have medical concerns or disabilities that would necessitate special consideration within a district policy, and exemptions also acknowledge that there are situations in which mask-wearing is not feasible, such as while eating or drinking.

Due to the necessity of responding to local needs, protecting students' academic success, the recommendations of the public health and educational authorities, and the voices of thousands of educators across Texas, ATPE supports local districts' authority to set their own face covering policies. Thus, we respectfully urge you to **SUPPORT HB 164.**

The Association of Texas Professional Educators (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, future, retired and para-educators and works to create better opportunities for 5 million public schoolchildren. ATPE is the ally and the voice of Texas public school educators. For additional information, contact ATPE Governmental Relations at (800) 777-2873 or government@atpe.org.