



July 22, 2020

Governor Greg Abbott  
P.O. Box 12428  
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Governor Abbott,

On behalf of Texas PTA, the largest child advocacy association in the state with over 523,000 members, I am writing to offer the perspective of parents as the opening day of school approaches. First, we want to acknowledge the work of Commissioner Morath and his team at TEA. It is impossible to fully comprehend the magnitude of the work required over the last several months to re-imagine school in the age of COVID-19.

We, like everyone involved in public schools, waited anxiously for the release of public health guidelines for re-opening schools. Parents' perspectives – our worries and expectations – are not that different from those of superintendents, principals, and teachers. We want our lives and the lives of our children to return to normal. Parents need to return to a more normal work environment. We want our children to return to school and to a strong and caring educational environment as soon as possible. But, today, as our state sees dramatic and steady growth in the number of new cases of coronavirus, increasing numbers of persons hospitalized, and increasing deaths, it is obvious to parents that there is no return-to-normal scenario for the near future.

We were glad to see last week's announcement that school districts will be allowed to operate virtually, with continued state funding, if local conditions dictate it. Giving control to families, school communities, and local health officials to make the best decisions for their communities is a long-standing tenet of Texas PTA. We urge you to continue to seek the input of school leaders as we continue to adjust every aspect of our lives during this unprecedented time.

We believe Texas PTA is well-positioned to offer the perspective of Texas families, and we would welcome the opportunity to do so. Without question, our children would benefit emotionally and academically by returning to traditional, face-to-face instruction, but only if the health risks for them and for the adults who teach them are minimized. Basing re-opening decisions on student needs alone ignores the health and safety of teachers and staff. We urge you to continue to make decisions based on the health of everyone.

Texas PTA is partnering with the Greater Houston Partnership, the U.S. Chambers of Commerce Foundation, and National PTA on the Every Student Connected campaign. Together we are working to quantify the connectivity need; to better understand the challenges students and their families faced when instruction moved online; and to advocate for state, federal, corporate, and private funding to address this need.

We were very pleased to receive the announcement that Texas will commit \$200 million to addressing this problem that affects an overwhelming number of Texas students. **According to a June 2020 report from Common Sense Media, 1,828,917 Texas students lack adequate high-speed connection (34%) and 1,229,459 lack devices (25%).** This disparity must be addressed quickly to ensure an equitable education in a safe environment for all our kids; otherwise, these students will again be left out.

As we move forward, we urge you to maintain the focus on how best to educate our students while protecting them and the adults in their lives, and to give school leaders the financial certainty they need to budget for the coming school year. To ensure stability in staffing and necessary funds for the additional support students will need in the coming months, we urge you to ensure predictability of funding. Many districts are anticipating enrollment declines and poor attendance due to COVID-19. They are facing unprecedented financial burdens. Without funding certainty, teachers and staff are vulnerable to layoffs that schools cannot bear at this critical time. The negative impact to students' educational continuity would be significant, not to mention the impact on local economies across the state.

We appreciate the challenge that the pandemic has presented to decision-makers, especially you, Governor Abbott. Many of the challenges we face require choosing the best choice among bad choices. We understand that. Giving districts the ability to make some of these decisions in the best interests of their community is one we strongly support.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Suzi Kennon", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Suzi Kennon  
Texas PTA President

cc: Mike Morath, Commissioner Texas Education Agency

#### **About Texas PTA**

Texas PTA is the largest child advocacy association in Texas with over 523,000 members. From parents to grandparents and educators to community leaders, Texas PTA has a diverse volunteer base that shares a special interest in our state's public education system. The association's mission is to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.