



July 13, 2020

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

Dear Governor Abbott,

As the largest child advocacy association in the state, we take our work on behalf of Texas families very seriously. During these challenging times, we know that you and your team, and TEA under the leadership of Commissioner Mike Morath, are working hard to identify ways to teach our children while keeping them safe during the coronavirus pandemic. Your decision this spring to cancel STAAR testing was responsive to the crisis and its impact on students in every part of our state, and was roundly applauded.

Over the course of the last few months of school, we saw how real the digital divide is among our students. Thousands of students did not receive any instruction once school buildings were shuttered – many districts were unable to locate students; and many students did not have the internet connectivity nor the appropriate devices to receive instruction of any kind. While the shift to online learning was difficult for all students and their families, it was impossible for many. Because of this, we saw the gap in access to equitable education widen dramatically. This gap is a crisis of its own.

Texas PTA and National PTA are partnering with the Greater Houston Partnership (GHP) and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation on a project to address this problem. Every Student Connected is an initiative to raise awareness of the need to close the connectivity gap brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Together with GHP we'll work with Texas officials, telecommunication partners, and the federal government to bridge this gap, but until it is done, there is no place for high stakes state assessment during a pandemic.

We urge you to seek a waiver from administering the federally required assessments for the 2020-2021 school year from the U. S. Department of Education. It is the right thing to do.

Due to the sudden and unplanned disruption of learning in the spring, our teachers have weeks' worth of instruction to deliver before they can even begin to teach the TEKS for the 2020-2021 school year. When school begins, the state must allow educators time to focus on the needs of the students – assessing students to identify gaps in learning due to the pandemic and teaching the missing concepts. It is critical we give our children, educators, and schools time to recover instructionally and emotionally from last school year while coping with an uncertain future.

There is not a scenario in which administration of STAAR testing is appropriate in the coming year. Not one scenario. The focus now must be allowing all Texans – including students and families, educators and

school districts – time to adequately adapt to a crisis we are still very much living every day. This virus spreads with indiscriminate reach, and our parents are rightfully nervous to send their children to school in August.

Until we close the gap on equitable education – offering the real choice between classroom instruction and virtual instruction for students based on need, not on their household income or where they live – we are not ready to return to STAAR testing.

We respectfully request a pause in STAAR assessment for the 2020-2021 school year, and urge you to request a waiver from the USDE.

With respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Suzi Kennon", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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.