



July 13, 2020

Mr. Mike Morath
Commissioner of Education
Texas Education Agency
1701 N. Congress Ave.
Austin, TX 78701

Dear Commissioner Morath,

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Round Rock ISD has adhered to guiding principles to influence every decision we make. They include:

- Prioritize student and staff safety and wellbeing
- Focus on equity
- Stay flexible

We have appreciated the ongoing dialogue and guidance from the Texas Education Agency throughout this challenging time, but, given the current public health conditions, we have grave concerns with the [information released last week](#) by TEA and particularly the mandate that school districts “must provide daily on-campus attendance for students otherwise entitled to attend school who follow this document’s required public health procedures and whose parents wish them to attend on-campus each day”.

We had all hoped that conditions would improve during the summer but, as you know, they have worsened dramatically over the past month, particularly in our metropolitan areas, including the Austin-Round Rock region. Governor Abbott has had to reconsider the pace at which he has reopened businesses and has scaled back and reversed decisions in attempts to keep Texans safe.

If we are to start school on time and under the current conditions provided by the Texas Education Agency, we must begin now preparing our employees to return in a matter of weeks. However, we know this is not in the best interest of our staff, our students, our communities or our state.

We are home to more than 7,000 dedicated teachers, administrators and support staff members in Round Rock ISD who want nothing more than to safely welcome our 51,000 students back to campus. We know that in-person instruction is what is best for our students’ academic success and emotional wellbeing. But first and foremost we must protect the health and safety of both our staff and students so that, in time, we can all return to normal.

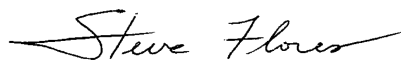
We have never faced a challenge like this in public education and we appreciate the concerns that must be taken into account at the state level. However, one lost life when it comes to our students and educators is one too many. If we continue on the current course, heedless of data and scientific research, we will inevitably put lives in danger.

As a public school district, we must follow the rules and regulations set forth by the Texas Governor and the Commissioner of Education. However, we implore you to allow local districts to make decisions based on the conditions facing their community in an effort to protect public health and ensure the safety of students and staff. In partnership with other school districts, we are requesting that the Texas Education Agency:

1. Suspend in-person school until the seven-day average hospitalization rate is five or less, the threshold set by the [Austin-Travis County public health agency](#) for a Stage 2 response.
2. Provide additional funding to supplement costs incurred by districts to provide safe and effective learning, specifically by appropriating CARES ACT funding directly to districts rather than supplanting state funding with this federal infusion meant to support pandemic efforts.
3. Suspend the STAAR and the A-F grading system for the 2020-2021 school year.

This is a historic moment in our country's public education system. Lives depend on the decisions we are making. We understand that the future of our country depends on the education we provide our students, but for long term success, we must protect our students and educators now. We must provide schools with the resources they need to keep students healthy and academically engaged in a safe environment until we are through this storm. We look forward to the day when we can once again provide our students with the instruction, services, extracurricular activities and all the important aspects of in-person education they deserve, but we cannot do so at the expense of their safety and the safety of our entire community. Please help as we strive to protect our staff, students and families.

Respectfully,



Steve Flores, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Round Rock ISD



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