



July 14, 2020

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

Dear Commissioner Morath,

Throughout the summer, Pflugerville ISD staff have continued planning for the upcoming school year, with our top priority remaining our staff and students' safety. With 32 different campuses and learning communities, we understand our schools, staff, and families have different needs and challenges. We are working to address these different needs and challenges to meet the educational, social, and emotional needs of our students, while also balancing that with our staff members' safety and emotional needs.

However, even as we are only a few short weeks away from the start of school, the number of COVID-19 cases in Texas have continued to increase. Unfortunately, last week's guidance from TEA mandated that all school districts "must provide daily on-campus attendance for students... whose parents wish them to attend on-campus each day." This is disappointing as it does not provide local school districts the flexibility to make decisions based on local data or community and staff values and expectations. Furthermore, it removes local school officials' ability to adequately address teacher well-being, including space limitations due to social distancing requirements.

We understand this is a historic event that has changed the face of education in our country. Our district and campus staff are committed to being flexible to provide diverse educational plans to meet the variety of needs of our students and families, both in-person and virtually. We only ask that the Texas Education Agency and Commissioner Morath also show flexibility and understand that what may work for one district may not work for another. As Governor Abbott said regarding state orders during this pandemic, what is right for one area of Texas may not be right for other areas.

As a state-regulated institution, we will continue to operate within the guidelines set by TEA and Governor Greg Abbott, taking every precaution available to us to operate schools safely and effectively. However, we strongly advocate for the following items:

- suspension of in-person school and allowance for 100% virtual learning until the seven-day hospitalization average is five or less, the threshold set by the Austin-Travis County public health agency for a stage 2 response;
- flexibility to realistically minimize classroom ratios and provide social distancing;
- the suspension of STAAR and the A-F system for the 2020-21 school year;
- additional funding to supplement costs incurred by districts to provide safe and effective learning; and
- a commitment to allocate current or future federal money specified for schools as a supplement to the state's existing funding commitments.

We know that in-person education is obviously the best format for our students' educational and emotional well-being; however, it does not counterbalance the safety risk to our educators and staff members. Every year, teachers and campus staff are asked to do more, give more and sacrifice more, and serve in various roles for all students, including educator, mentor, counselor, cheerleader, and protector. In addition to all of these, how can we also ask them to put the health and safety of themselves and their families at risk with no alternative?

No one wants to be back in the classroom more than our teachers. We are excited to see our kids again and resume our regular schedules and activities, but we cannot do so at the potential cost to our teachers, staff, and students. We hope you will reconsider the previous mandates and do what is truly in all Texas school children's best interests.

Sincerely,



Doug Killian, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools



Vernagene Mott
President, Board of Trustees