

May 13, 2020

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Office of the Governor
1100 San Jacinto Blvd
Austin, TX 78701

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

Dear Governor Abbott and Commissioner Morath,

As the COVID-19 crisis continues to exact a heavy toll on students and teachers in public and private schools across the state, we appreciate your strong leadership and thoughtful response during what is likely the most difficult schooling period in modern history.

Like you, our organizations hear from and work with thousands of parents and teachers across our great state. We are writing to provide recommendations on how funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act can be utilized immediately to support families as they work to fill in learning gaps and manage the educational uncertainty they are experiencing in these extraordinary times. Texas has already led the nation in its rapid response to the unprecedented education challenges arising from school closures. Texas should continue to be a national leader in providing flexible and innovative solutions to the education crisis our students are facing. We need to put resources and options directly into the hands of our hardworking families.

Here are four legally-authorized ways to utilize the CARES Act funding to help all of our Texas students:

1. **Special Education:** Many students with special needs did not receive the services they were entitled to and needed during the spring semester. They have suffered greatly. The state of Texas should provide grants to these students, both those in public school and those enrolled in private education, to access these services over the summer so that all students can be back on track before schools reopen in the fall. The grants could cover educational therapy, tutoring services, curriculum, and instruction from public and private providers.
2. **Connectivity:** Though Texas schools have worked hard to accommodate all students, many of our Texas students have struggled to access schoolwork online. We applaud you for recognizing this issue through the launch of "Operation Connectivity." As one news report put it, the Task Force will "push for federal and state-level policies that connect more students learning at home to available technology resources." We couldn't agree more. The state of Texas should provide connectivity grants to our neediest families to make sure that their children can continue to stay connected to their public or private school for online learning.
3. **Virtual Education:** Texas must overhaul and expand its statewide infrastructure to continue remote or blended student learning effectively into the upcoming school year. This would include investing the necessary resources to rebuild the TXVSN platform and

staff, expediting virtual course development and approval, providing teacher professional development as they learn how to effectively provide remote instruction, and assisting schools in solving problems of student access. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, we must be far better equipped to make the transition to virtual learning as needed.

4. **Equitable Distribution:** The economic downturn has hit Texas private schools extremely hard, as these schools' funds are based on tuition payments and philanthropy. Currently private schools in Texas are preparing for a 20 to 50 percent drop in enrollment for the upcoming school year; whether that improves or worsens depends on an equitable inclusion of all Texas students in our state response. When parents cannot pay tuition and donors have no available funds to give, the schools cannot pay teachers, and very few options remain. Private school closures would inevitably put additional students in public schools at taxpayers' expense, driving up public school enrollment just as the state heads toward tight budget years. One recent [estimate](#) puts the additional cost to the state and local school districts at hundreds of millions per year if even 10 percent of Texas private school students move into public schools. The best way to prevent this compounded effect of the pandemic is to make grants to nonprofit scholarship organizations that can in turn provide scholarships to the lower income students attending private schools that are at risk of closing. Several schools have already had to close their doors. We must do something now to assist the rest before it's too late.

It is vital that all students attending all schools, both public and private, are eligible for any assistance given during this trying time. We believe all of our children deserve access to a high-quality education. Texans know how to unite and bring "all hands on deck" to serve one another during a crisis. We only need the tools that these steps provide. Through these actions, you have the power to ensure that our young Texans have equal opportunities to educationally thrive.

Sincerely,

