



June 24, 2020

EDITION - 15



The Texas Education Agency (TEA) and school districts are actively planning the 2020-2021 school year. COVID-19 continues to cause a lot of disruption to our economy, our lives, and business processes across the entire country, including to public education. I have received numerous emails from parents and teachers who are interested in what the plans and guidance to school districts entail to protect public health and simultaneously provide a high-quality education.

One of the best tools available to school districts to provide flexibility is online classrooms. Last session, I also authored Senate Bill 2244, which would have expanded virtual learning opportunities for students and districts. In April, I and my Senate Education Committee colleagues sent Commissioner Morath a letter to expand online learning opportunities and to continue funding school districts that provide their students online learning. I fully support expanding distance and virtual learning opportunities for school districts and students as an ongoing option for public schools and I will work on similar legislation next legislative session which begins in January 2021. Last session, the Texas Legislature invested billions of dollars into the public education system through House Bill 3, a commitment that the legislature is standing by.

I have talked to TEA Commissioner Morath and my school superintendents to listen to their plans and the school district needs throughout the spring semester. The principles of providing the best education to our children remain, but we must all work together to remain safe and flexible as we enter this school year. With thousands of school districts in Texas, each with a unique population and geography, school districts will have to make many decisions with the TEA providing some additional resources to supplement school districts, such as additional online learning opportunities and grants and reimbursements to ensure students can connect.

I remain optimistic that schools can re-open for in-person learning safely in 2020-2021,1 with flexible options and innovation, as we will all need to be responsible for the public health of our families and our neighbors.



STATE OF TEXAS UPDATES

[Texas Education Agency Guidance to School Districts](#)

This week, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) released guidelines for student attendance for the 2020-2021 school year. Texas does base school funding on average daily attendance as the basis for distributing funds to school districts. This has been the practice of school funding for decades to ensure equitable and efficient funding for school districts and account for local differences through additional funding weights.

During the spring semester, the TEA calculated average daily attendance for school districts to maintain the school funding formulas, but schools were not required to take actual student attendance. For the 2020-2021 school year, students will be allowed to take online courses from home and have that count as their average daily attendance. School districts will count attendance for those taking online course by two different methods: synchronous instruction or asynchronous instruction. In

synchronous instruction, classes will be live with students present with the teacher for instruction with teachers also providing input by video conferencing or telephone. Asynchronous instruction is self-paced, pre-recorded courses that are not simulcast with the remainder of the class. School districts will have to submit plans to the TEA for how they will implement asynchronous instruction for the 2020-2021 school year as each school district is unique. School districts and students will be provided grace in this process and districts will have their funding held harmless.

[Click here](#) for the TEA presentation on Preparing for Remote Instruction.

[Click here](#) for the TEA frequently asked questions for enrollment and attendance.

Governor's Press Conference on Public Health

This week, Governor Abbott held a press conference to update Texans on the recent increase in COVID-19 cases. The Governor re-iterated the Department of State Health Services [best practices](#) to reduce the spread of COVID-19, which include:

- Wash hands often for 20 seconds and encourage others to do the same.
- If no soap and water are available, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, then throw the tissue away.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Disinfect surfaces, buttons, handles, knobs, and other places touched often.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Department of State Health Services both [recommend wearing a mask](#) to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Sunset Commission Update

Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick appointed me to serve on the Sunset Advisory Commission in January 2020. Members of the Commission are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor and Speaker of the House and include five senators, five representatives, and two members of the public.

Public input is essential to the sunset review process, and the public is encouraged to be involved at all stages. Individuals, organizations, and businesses that will be

affected by an agency's operations and services have firsthand knowledge and experience to help us identify problems and opportunities as we work to make our state government more effective and more efficient.

[Click here](#) to learn more about the sunset process, find out what agencies are currently under review, and to read current and past reviews. [Click here](#) to submit public input.

Texas Armed Service Scholarship Program

My office is currently accepting applications for the [Texas Armed Services Scholarship Program \(TASSP\)](#). Interested applicants should be constituents of Senate District 8 and send a completed application, resume, and a letter outlining future goals to my district office (604 S. Watters Road, Suite 100; Allen, Texas 75013) or by email (Angela.Paxton@senate.texas.gov) on or before July 31, 2020.

TASSP is a program created by the Legislature in 2009 to encourage students to complete a baccalaureate degree and become a commissioned member of the Texas Army National Guard, Texas Air National Guard, Texas State Guard, U.S. Coast Guard, or U.S. Merchant Marine or become a commissioned officer in any branch of the U.S. armed services. Each legislative office has the opportunity to award a single scholarship each year for a college student who is in an ROTC program and meets the academic performance requirement.

To apply, please visit my Senate webpage and [click here](#) for a copy of the application and instructions.

DISTRICT INFORMATION

Collin CARES Act

On May 11, the Collin County Commissioners Court approved the distribution of direct financial assistance for housing, utilities, and groceries; increased COVID-19 testing; personal protective equipment; and, COVID-19 costs and recovery efforts for cities and towns through the [Collin CARES Act](#).



- > FAMILY, INDIVIDUAL ASSISTANCE
- > TOWNS & CITIES ASSISTANCE
- > COVID-19 TESTING FOR UNINSURED

Dallas County Emergency Small Business Assistance Program Opens

The goal of the Emergency Small Business Assistance Program (EBAP) is to quickly provide eligible small businesses with emergency financial assistance (up to \$15,000) in the form of a small, forgivable loan. Pre-applications will be accepted now through June 28. [Click here](#) for eligibility requirements and to apply.



**DALLAS COUNTY
EMERGENCY SMALL BUSINESS
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

**SUBMIT YOUR
PRE-APPLICATION
JUNE 15-28, 2020**

PROGRAM IS NOT FIRST-COME FIRST-SERVED.
A RANDOMIZED BORROWER SELECTION PROCESS WILL BE
CONDUCTED AT THE END OF THE PRE-APPLICATION PERIOD.

**FOR MORE INFO:
[HTTPS://NDCONLINE.ORG/NTXSMALLBIZ](https://ndconline.org/NTXSMALLBIZ)**

COVID-19 RELATED INFORMATION

COVID-19 Testing Sites

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) maintains a list of COVID-19 in-person and drive-thru screening and antibody testing sites. [Click here](#) to find testing locations near you.

Additionally, DSHS offers a list of "things to consider when looking for a public or drive-thru testing site," including the following:

- Do I know the screening criteria for the public / drive-thru testing site?
- Do I know the operating hours for the public / drive-thru testing site?
- Do I know if I need a referral from my doctor before I visit the public / drive-thru testing site?
- Do I know if the public / drive-thru testing site is covered by my insurance provider and/or how the billing process works?
- Do I know what type of test is offered at the public / drive-thru testing site?
- Do I know how to get my testing results?

For more information about testing, please visit [DSHS' COVID-19 Testing Information site](#).

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) is [tracking COVID-19 cases](#) and updates its site with the latest information each day.

