



Pete's Periódico

Back to School

by Sen. Pete Flores, Senate District 19

August 10, 2020

We made it to August, a month many see as a pivot from the slow summer break and to the busy fall filled with school, sports, holidays, and the occasional cool weather. Of course, this year is different, especially for our K–12 students.

The Texas Constitution states it is the duty of the Legislature to provide an “efficient system of public free schools.” The recent 86th Legislative Session was primarily focused on education; we increased funding per student, established pay increases for teachers, balanced the pension fund for retired educators, and provided some retirees with a one-time supplemental check. I strongly supported this position and my affirmative votes reflected it.

How to best serve students and open schools during this ongoing pandemic is an incredibly complex decision. But it is a decision that must be made by local school districts. In a state as large and diverse as Texas, a blanket order on school operation will likely do more harm than good. On this, I agree.

Last week, the state’s top elected officials – Governor Greg Abbott, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, Texas House Speaker Dennis Bonnen – and the leaders of the Education Committees in the House and Senate released a statement regarding opening schools with a simple message: let districts decide. The authority to make decisions about when and how schools safely open rests with the constitutionally and statutorily established local school boards.

School districts can choose to open in August, September, or even later. But, whenever the local school board chooses to open, the board must comply with the requirement to provide the necessary number of days and hours of instruction for students. The Texas Education Agency and Texas Attorney General have been very helpful in providing clarity and resources on how this can be done.

By many factors, Texas remains incredibly healthy, ranking #22 in deaths per capita and #8 most deaths in the nation, despite being the second-largest state. We remain under statewide mandates on wearing masks, occupancy limits, and more in an effort to keep Texans safe. All policies have the potential for negative effects, but we must try something to slow the spread of COVID-19 and keep vulnerable Texans safe.

The best resources for COVID-19 remains the Texas Department of State Health Services: learn the symptoms, explore the data, and find testing locations at their website: <https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/>. If you have specific questions about COVID-19, please do not hesitate to contact DSHS directly: dial 2-1-1 and choose option 6 or email coronavirus@dshs.texas.gov.

There are testing centers across Senate District 19 outside of Bexar County: Uvalde, Hondo, Eagle Pass, Del Rio, plus in relatively close cities such as Odessa, Van Horn, Sonora, and Junction. Mobile testing sites continue to make their way around underserved parts of Texas – keep an eye on the DSHS testing map for a mobile testing center coming to your community.

We must continue to work together to practice common sense hygiene and public behavior to contain the spread of the virus. The sooner we get our state working, the better it is for us all.

I must end on a tragic note – on Saturday, August 8, three Texas Parks and Wildlife Department employees died in a helicopter crash in Brewster County. They dedicated their lives to wildlife conservation in our great state and lost their lives doing what they believed in. The pilot, a private

contractor, survived the crash and is undergoing further treatment. We will always remember their service to our state and Senate District 19.

We will prevail in true Texas fashion. I remain ever optimistic and am thankful to have the opportunity to honorably serve all of the people of Texas Senate District 19.

Sen. Pete Flores is a Republican Texas Senator representing Senate District 19.

To contact Sen. Flores, call his Capitol office at (512) 463-0119 or send an email to District19.Flores@senate.texas.gov. For daily updates, follow him on Facebook: /SenatorPeteFlores and on Twitter: @PeteFlores_TX.