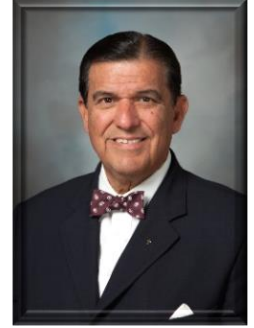




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Senator Lucio Requests Increased Resources to Public Schools for their Fall Reopening

Education Vice Chair joins 21 organizations in requesting increased support for students and staff from TEA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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AUSTIN, TX – Today, Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr., (D-Brownsville) released a June 13 correspondence in which he requested Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath to provide increased resources and support to Texas public schools as they prepare for their Fall reopening.

In the June 13 letter Sen. Lucio stated, “As Vice Chairman of the Senate Education Committee, I write to you on behalf of our public school children who are unfortunately shouldering the consequences of the COVID-19 public health crisis. It is with a sense of urgency that I seek your help, as the Texas Education Commissioner, in ensuring public school districts have the necessary resources to provide the mental health services that our students need during these uncertain, challenging times.”

Specifically, Sen. Lucio went on to say, “I respectfully seek your assistance in ensuring that the necessary mental health resources and support are available for our children. By no fault of their own, our children are facing unprecedented challenges and confronting stress levels that no one could have foreseen.”

The Education Vice Chair was referencing findings reported by a May 20 letter that the Director of Mental Health Policy with Texans Care for Children, Ms. Josette Saxton, shared with his office in which 21 organizations jointly signed and sent to the Education Commissioner. The May 20 multi-organization letter reported,

“The number of children and families experiencing adversities during the pandemic is sobering:

- *Rates of mental health and substance abuse concerns are projected to sharply rise, continuing to affect children, families, communities, and schools in the coming months and years. As families lose employer sponsored health insurance, children and families lose access to needed behavioral health care.*
- *More than two million Texans have applied for unemployment benefits in the past two months, highlighting the financial insecurity that is leading to food insecurity and housing instability.*
- *Just two months into the pandemic, there are reports of alarming increases in family violence in Texas.*
- *The separation, anxiety, and loss stemming from COVID-19 will continue to rise, along with the number of families who will experience grief and trauma.*

These concerns should be front and center given the extent of the trauma, stress, and prolonged adversity that children are experiencing during this pandemic.”

Amid increased concerns by educator groups over the recent Texas Education Agency (TEA) announcement of the in-person Fall reopening of public schools, Senator Lucio stated today “I reiterate my support of non-profits, like Texans Care for Children, and join educators in expressing concerns that must be addressed prior to the Fall reopening of Texas public schools.”

Among the 21 organizations jointly signing the May 20 letter include, but are not limited to: the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health; Texans Care for Children; Texas PTA; Texas Counseling Association; Texas Family Violence Network; Association of Texas Professional Educators; Texas State Teachers Association; and the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals.

In his June 13 correspondence, Sen. Lucio stated “I join Josette Saxton, Director of Mental Health Policy with Texans Care for Children (who I have worked with over the years in advocating for the mental health needs of our school children), and the 21 exceptional organizations who jointly have asked you to direct our school districts to prioritize the mental health needs of all students and staff. As public servants, I trust that we see eye-to-eye when I say that the unfathomable adversities that the public health crisis is causing on our families and their children require our state to respond in an extraordinary, comprehensive, Texas-sized manner.”

The native Rio Grande Valley Senator went out to ask TEA Commissioner Morath in his June correspondence, “I respectfully ask you to strengthen Texas' effort to help our public schools by working with our governor in seeking state, federal, and private resources to assist our school districts. There is no doubt in my mind that your steadfast commitment to our school children will prove to be successful in addressing the critical help that is needed, especially by public schools that -- due to their low tax base -- lack the necessary resources to address the unprecedented social, emotional, and mental health adversities confronting their students.”

In his June correspondence, Sen. Lucio went on to report, “Please rest assured that as Senate Education Vice Chair, and as a member of the Texas Senate Work Group on Public Schools, I am currently working on a series of legislative reforms for the 2021 Legislative Session to assist in this effort. During the upcoming legislative session, I am committed to working with Josette and Texans Care for Children in instituting a comprehensive revitalization of our Education Code to modernize the manner by which Texas assists our public schools in helping our children overcome these historic hardships.”

Today, Senator Lucio reiterated, “Texas must provide guidance and resources to our public schools so that every challenge that this public health crisis brings is met with an equally as strong Texas-sized solution. Our public school children require no less.”

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Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. (D-Brownsville) represents Cameron, Hidalgo, Kenedy, Kleberg, and Willacy Counties. He is the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Intergovernmental Relations; Vice Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education; Member of the Senate Committees on State Affairs; Veteran Affairs & Border Security; and of the Select Committees on Redistricting; and, Texas Ports. He is member of the Sunset Advisory Commission and has been an ex-officio member of the DSHS Task Force of Border Public Health Officials since 2017. Elected in 1991, Lucio is third in seniority in the Texas Senate.