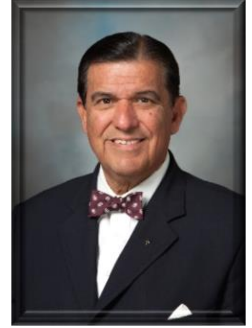




# STATE SENATOR EDDIE LUCIO, JR. DISTRICT 27



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**Sen. Lucio Requests Increased Flexibility and Greater Educator Involvement in the Reopening of Valley Schools**  
*Amid alarming COVID-19 infections, Texas Governor and Education Commissioner urged to provide greater options*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

Friday, July 10, 2020

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**AUSTIN, TX** – Today, Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. (D-Brownsville) released his July 9 letter to Governor Greg Abbott and Education Commissioner Mike Morath requesting increased flexibility and greater educator involvement in the reopening of Rio Grande Valley public schools. Sen. Lucio, who is the Vice Chair of the Texas Senate Education Committee, has been requesting for Texas to provide Valley schools a tailored, localized approach that directly takes into account the severity of the COVID-19 outbreak the region is experiencing, rather than a generic "one-size fits all" approach.

The Rio Grande Valley Senator advocated for his constituents when he explained to the Texas leaders in charge of the reopening of public schools, *"communities in my senate district are struggling to keep our families and children safe from the deadly COVID-19 outbreak. With the RGV a hotbed of community infection, the newly released policies mandating and guiding the reopening of public schools in our region have the potential to accelerate the surge of coronavirus cases."* Sen. Lucio went on to write, *"It is with a heavy heart that I implore you to respectfully listen to the outcry of the everyday heroes of our teaching profession and reevaluate the policies mandating an in-person reopening this fall."*

Sen. Lucio's letter comes at a time when COVID-19 cases have severely surged across the Valley and greatly strained the local public health care system. Local South Texas media outlets have documented how school administrators, educators, and parents are worried that requiring schools to reopen for in-person instruction could lead to an even stronger accelerated outbreak of the coronavirus. School administrators and educators in COVID-19 hotbed regions, like the Rio Grande Valley, have argued that they need greater input and increased flexibility involving the re-opening of their schools. At the same time, teacher associations are working with local educators to urge the Texas Governor to take into account their welfare and provide them a more cautious approach to reopening schools.

*"Educators across our great state have proven to be one of Texas' greatest resources,"* wrote Sen. Lucio. *"As public servants, I trust we agree decisions affecting teachers and students, especially in relation to their health and safety should be made with teacher consultation, since they bring a unique insight that may not be apparent from the state capitol."*

While advocating for the Rio Grande Valley, Sen. Lucio reiterated his past calls for making available all the resources necessary for schools to continue instruction, including the personal protective equipment needed to create a safe in-person learning environment, and the technology students need to access digital learning. In his letter, Sen. Lucio cited a report showing how student achievement gaps based on family income widened during the portion of the spring 2020 semester that took place in a distance-learning format.

Echoing the findings, Sen. Lucio went on to inform Gov. Abbott and Commissioner Morath that, *"any reopening strategy must focus on equity, as it is our constitutional and moral duty to deliver an appropriate education to every student in this state, regardless of race, ethnicity, primary language, income, or ZIP code."* The Valley Senator then wrote, *"I thank and commend you for your efforts to provide funding to address these gaps and request your continued assistance in ensuring that lack of access does not widen the already considerable achievement gap should conditions necessitate a default to distance learning."*

"We need to trust our Texas educators to know what is best for the children they serve," Sen. Lucio said of the letter and his efforts to get state leaders to reevaluate the current reopening policies for public schools. "I wanted to share what local teachers have been telling me with Governor Abbott and Commissioner Morath. I trust they will give our constituents and their concerns the attention they deserve."

Sen. Lucio, concluded by stating today, "with a sense of urgency, I implore our Texas leaders to understand the severity of COVID-19 outbreak in our community. Help us keep our families safe. By the state tailoring our reopening strategies to local conditions and providing the resources necessary to protect the health of our students and teachers, I know the Valley will be able to safely ensure no one falls through the cracks."

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**Attachments:**

- **2020.07.09 Abbott-Morath Reopening Letter-d3.pdf**
- **2020-07-10 NEWS RELEASE - Sen Lucio letter to Gov Abbott on schools reopening.pdf**

*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.*