



December 23, 2020

Governor Greg Abbott  
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 12428  
Austin, Texas 78711-2428

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

Dear Governor Abbott and Commissioner Morath,

Thank you for your work to address the needs of our students, educators, and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout this time, we have witnessed leadership in our classrooms, and for that we are grateful. Today, we write to request the Texas Education Agency (TEA) seek the necessary federal waivers to cancel the administration of the 2020-2021 State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exam.

Through the uncertainty of this pandemic, our students, educators, and staff had to adjust their teaching and learning methods, quickly creating a new format of educational instruction. Moreover, teachers had to remain focused on new needs of students – some of whom contracted COVID-19, whose parents lost their jobs, and other circumstances that prevented students from learning. It was critical for the state to implement guidelines to conduct the school year. However, this led to a patchwork of teaching across our state, further confusion, and prompted many educators to pass on this school year. Quite frankly, districts have themselves had to make changes from in-person teaching to online, because of a breakout of COVID-19 on their respective campuses. Moreover, the digital divide that our students face has only exacerbated during this pandemic. Districts around our state were unable to locate students; and many students did not have the internet connectivity or appropriate devices to receive instruction of any kind.

An administration of the STAAR exam would not be a proper measure of a student's knowledge. Rather, the test would measure how well a student is doing during a global pandemic. Last year, Governor Abbott waived the STAAR exams, stating the health and safety of students, faculty, and families were our top priority. The case is no different this year, as the virus has only worsened over time and its negative impact on our educators and students is evident. While cautionary measures may have been taken, we have witnessed an alarming rate of COVID-19 cases. According to the Department of State Health Services, as of mid-December, Texas is responsible for 57,137 students and 33,027 staff members whom tested positive for COVID-19 in Texas public schools. As of mid-December, Texas remains responsible for 1.4 million cases of COVID-19, resulting in 24,954 deaths.



Today, we write to request the TEA seek the necessary federal waivers to cancel the administration of the 2020-2021 STAAR exam. As leaders of this State, we must protect the best interests of our educators and students. There is not a scenario in which administration of STAAR testing is appropriate for this coming year. Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

José Menéndez  
Texas Senate District 26

Carol Alvarado  
Texas Senate District 6

Sarah Eckhardt  
Texas Senate District 14

Eddie Lucio, Jr.  
Texas Senate District 27

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