

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Office of the Governor
1100 San Jacinto Boulevard
Austin, Texas 78701

July 30, 2020

Governor Abbott:

All of us understand what a trying, difficult time this is – for our businesses, for our families, for our fellow Texans and for our elected leaders. We can choose to stay in that state of inertia – as the Left and their allies in the media wish, during this election season – or we can choose the better path of returning Texas to some semblance of normalcy. That must happen immediately or we will see a deepening of the devastating economic and social consequences that may well permanently alter Texas as we know it.

Governor Abbott, we know, based on your repeated public statements, that there will not be another shutdown in Texas; thank you for your recent definitive statements about avoiding what would be an unnecessary continuation of the present calamity. Consequently, we focus instead on an equally important matter: **the urgent need for all schools to reopen in person, with the option given to parents to choose virtual education for their children.**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released new guidance warning about severe consequences to children if schools do not reopen for in-person class in the fall. The CDC's updated guidance now aligns with recommendations made by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), which endorsed school re-openings with limited exceptions last month.

Dozens of school districts in Texas have adopted "reopening" plans that offer virtual education only, with no choice given parents for in-person instruction. Worse still, some local health officials are singling out school districts with orders that explicitly, or effectively, close public schools – once again, with no choice given to parents to elect in-person instruction.

This is disastrous for children. With more than two-thirds of Texas households either having a single-parent or two wage-earners, virtual education is a literal impossibility for many and a hardship for most Texas kids. The educational losses will likely never be regained, creating critical educational gaps. This is especially true for our most underprivileged students. They, more than anyone, will bear the brunt of the irresponsible and agenda-driven desire to keep our schools shuttered. And we know that virtual classrooms are no substitute for in-person learning; as a recent Wall Street Journal news report (not op-ed) headline succinctly put it, "The Results Are In for Remote Learning; It Didn't Work."

Furthermore, as we learn more about COVID-19, we now know that elementary and middle school-aged children are practically impervious to it; even high schoolers, who bear a slightly higher risk than younger students, are relatively safe when compared to adult cohorts. The scores of daycares and summer camps that have been operating in Texas are further evidence of this fact. We will harm children far worse, therefore, by keeping schools closed than by reopening. Finally, considering the safety protocols that we all have learned to adopt for air travel, grocery shopping, and church attendance, teacher unions' concerns about health and safety can surely be overcome by following the same best practices as the broader community.

In short, Governor Abbott, Texan families need your strong leadership on schools right now. So much hinges on whether school children are in classrooms – most of all, our young Texans' well-being, and their parent's ability to work and provide for themselves. Texas, of all places, should be leading the way for the nation in how we balance our shared desire to minimize the threat from COVID while going about our lives.

What is needed is clarity from the State to ensure the return of our school children to their classrooms, if parents so choose. We strongly urge you to take the following actions:

1. Instruct the Commissioner of the Texas Department of State Health Services to revoke these restrictive health orders, thereby freeing up schools to make their own decisions.
2. Instruct the Commissioner of the Texas Education Agency to require school districts to open in-person no later than Tuesday, September 8, with virtual options available for families who request it.
3. You provide additional clarity that independent, charter, micro and private schools may choose to make their own reopening decisions and are not bound by overreaching COVID local health orders.
4. You and your administration – not local officials – determine which locales are “hot spots” for the virus; so, doing will allow a targeted, prudent approach to school reopenings in those areas.

With the start of the school year approaching, and with many districts making decisions on their reopening plan each day, we encourage you to move as quickly as possible to effect these changes. We must balance all the risks, and we must err on the side of what is in the best interested of Texas’ schoolchildren’s future.

Signed,

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Richard Weekley, Houston
Bill & Mary Jane Holmes, Midland

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