



Gregory-Portland Independent School District

Board of Trustees

21 September 2020

Dear Commissioner Morath,

As we are all painfully aware, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption to the daily lives of millions of people and those involved in public education have been impacted especially hard as there are many stakeholders to consider. Since March, school districts have developed and re-developed plans many times over in order to deliver quality instruction in the safest way feasible.

At Gregory-Portland ISD and across the state, teachers and staff are required to perform many roles over and above the many hats they wore during “pre-pandemic” days. They are required to be in person and virtual teachers, monitor and implement safety and cleaning protocols, provide technical and emotional support to students and parents, all while having to learn new computer skills and gain public health knowledge to perform their jobs safely and effectively. We expect our educators, staff, parents, and students to be as flexible as possible during these difficult times and by and large, they deliver because they believe that public education is a priority for our youth. It is now our turn to deliver for them. Just as we expect flexibility from everyone at the local level, we respectfully ask that TEA apply more flexibility to their plans also. Therefore, we strongly advocate for the following actions/measures for the 2020-2021 school year:

- **All school districts should be fully funded based on enrollment rather than attendance to offer students maximum flexibility in learning.** School districts should not be penalized for the extra-ordinary challenges this year presents, whether it be internet connectivity issues, or personal hardships students face, or anything in between.
- **Provide flexibility by waiving the 90% attendance rule for students and allow districts to grant course credit based off mastery of content**
- **Flexibility for each district to adopt and implement hybrid models of face-to-face instruction for ALL grade levels if deemed necessary to maintain social distance guidelines due to physical space and staffing limitations.** One of our biggest concerns is adequately accomplishing social distancing measures while providing five day a week face to face instruction for those who choose to participate. Decisions regarding school scheduling should be made by districts in conjunction with local health authorities including transitioning to 100% virtual learning when local viral transmission rates are too high to offer in person instruction in a safe manner and phasing back into face-to-face instruction as appropriate.
- **Accountability consequences and/or sanctions should be paused for 2020-21.** It is extremely unrealistic to hold students accountable for mastering an entire school year worth of content given the massive disruption in learning they have experienced for two back to back school years. Whether students are learning at school or at home, there are extensive challenges they face this year which impact their learning experience and psychological well-being.



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- **All Standardized testing should be placed on hold for 2020/2021.** Waiver applications should be submitted to the USDOE for any required testing. We do recognize the importance of criterion-reference testing in that it provides important diagnostic information regarding student growth, however, this year presents unique challenges. Upholding the expectations by maintaining TEA's current standard cut points puts unnecessary pressure on our teachers and students to perform at "normal" levels during a historic health crisis. By suspending testing this school year, school districts will be able to devote that time and extensive resources to the academic and emotional needs of our students. We need every possible minute to recover lost instructional time due to safety protocols and school closures.
- **Encourage consistency between UIL and TEA in regards to rules and guidance given to districts to minimize confusion at the local level.**
- **Provide assurance for teachers and staff who may need to be out of work due to COVID-19 for an extended period of time by providing unemployment insurance once 10 allotted sick days are used with the guarantee that their position will be reserved for them.** This should be offered if the employee is ill or if they have to care for a family member who is ill

Gregory-Portland ISD is the largest employer in our county. We recognize that our actions in regards to school operations can have a huge impact on the health of our community. For this reason, we respectfully ask that local decisions be supported at the state level. As previously stated, we have asked for an enormous amount of flexibility and sacrifice from all stakeholders, and now we ask for the ability to give some flexibility, support and assurance back to those that work so hard to make public education a priority throughout Texas.

Respectfully,

Victor Hernandez, Board President

Reynaldo Rojas, Board Vice-President

Carrie Gregory, Board Secretary

Dr. Michelle Cavazos, Superintendent

Dean Atkinson, Board Member

Gilbert Cortinas, Board Member

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