

August 18, 2020

To the Honorable Mike Morath
Commissioner
Texas Education Agency
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701

Re: COVID-19 Pandemic - STAAR Testing Cancellation

Dear Commissioner Morath,

As we enter the 2020-2021 school year, a truly unprecedented time, those of us leading at the front lines of public education are faced with a plethora of challenges that we are ready and willing to meet head on. We appreciate the state's support in providing PPE, hold harmless funding, and all pandemic related guidance, and recognize the insurmountable pressure you must have felt over the past several months trying to make the best decisions for over 5 million students in the state of Texas.

As the Superintendent of the Brazosport Independent School District, I am writing this letter to respectfully request the full cancellation of the STAAR assessment for the 2020-2021 school year. Continuing the suspension of STAAR for the 2020-2021 school year will allow administrators, educators, parents and students to focus on the health and safety of our students and staff without the heavy burden of high stakes testing. Also, there is no such thing as taking the STAAR exam as a benchmark only. We learned this through Hurricane Harvey. If the test is administered, it is scored. Once it is scored, students, teachers, campuses, districts, communities are rated. Our teachers are highly trained professionals who can identify student learning gaps.

We all recognize that the upcoming school year will look and feel completely different from years past. We have no guarantee that our district will not have interruptions to the school year requiring short or long term virtual learning. We also recognize that the most effective environment for a student to gain knowledge is in the classroom, face to face, with a highly trained and highly skilled educator. Without the guarantee that our students will be afforded the best learning environment, it would be inequitable and improper to move forward with this type of assessment in any form. The justification for assessment under the guise of "student achievement" without district accountability is a false premise in that the data collected would still be markedly skewed by the 9 weeks of crisis learning from the Spring of 2020 and continued disruptions we anticipate throughout the 2020-21 school year. Most districts, including ours, are starting the year in very untraditional ways which require transition periods that will impact the amount of quality instruction commonly received during the first several weeks of school.

The mission of Brazosport ISD is to graduate each student to be future ready.

P.O. Drawer Z ★ Freeport, TX 77542 ★ (979) 730-7000

It is imperative that we fully grasp the impact COVID-19 has had on public education before we begin to enforce assessments that would unfairly limit our student's achievement and improperly rate school accountability. It is far too soon to insist on testing that so greatly impacts a student's advancement to the next grade level, graduation, and eligibility for specialized programs.

We must all recognize that the pandemic is not over. While we are working tirelessly to open schools and "get back to normal", we also know that the future is very uncertain. Let us allow our educators to do what they do best - educate. We want to use all of the time we have to fill in the gaps of lost instruction and support the emotional needs of our students. Please put the needs of our students above the data and give us the appropriate time to recover.

We appreciate the work you do everyday for the students of Texas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Danny Massey", with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Danny Massey
Superintendent of Schools
Brazosport Independent School District