



# TEXAS HOUSE *of* REPRESENTATIVES

## Diego M. Bernal

State Representative, District 123

February 8, 2021

The Honorable Mike Morath  
Commissioner, Texas Education Agency  
1701 N. Congress Avenue  
Austin, Texas, 78701

Commissioner Morath:

We are writing to request the Texas Education Agency create a formal mechanism for students and families to opt-out of the 2020-2021 administration of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exams. A summary of student enrollment trends published by the Agency indicates that 46%—or 2,463,481 students—are engaged in online instruction. These students and their families are choosing virtual learning for a variety of reasons including, but certainly not limited to, protecting the health, well-being, and safety of themselves or family members.

Since March 2020, there has been and continues to be some degree of remote instruction for students across the State which allows districts to mitigate the transmission of coronavirus in our schools. Through the waiver of the Student Success Initiative for fifth and eighth grade students and the pause of the A-F Accountability system, the Agency has sought to balance the impacts of COVID-19 induced learning loss with the health and safety of students and educators.

Data reported to the Texas Department of State Health Services indicates that with only 54% of students present on-campus, 104,365 students and 58,358 school staff members have been infected with coronavirus. These weekly numbers have continued to rise, tracking the rising trend of coronavirus transmission in our communities. Requiring that all students be in-person for the administration of exams creates an untenable environment that puts students and school personnel at immense risk of transmission. Since it is evident that the Agency has no plans to seek the federal waivers necessary to cancel the 2020-2021 administration of the STAAR, something we strongly believe the Agency should reconsider, at a minimum it should allow students and their families the opportunity to opt-out of the exam.

We appreciate your time on this matter. As always, our offices stand ready to assist you in any manner you deem necessary.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diego M. Bernal".

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House District 131

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House District 121

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House District 103

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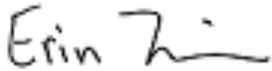
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